A ROMANCE OF BILLY-GOAT HILL

ALICE HEGAN RICE

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"Do you believe in love, Doctor?"

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BY

ALICE HEGAN RICE

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MRS. WIGGS OF THE CABBAGE PATCH
LOVEY MARY, SANDY, ETC.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"Do you believe in love, Doctor?" . . *Frontispiece*

The Colonel leaned back upon his knees and glared at Morley 19

There was a sharp report, a smothered groan, then a heavy fall 61

She held it to the flame, and watched it burn to ashes on the hearth 101

Maria began to cry, and forgot to jolt the Boarder . 233

Mrs. Sequin paused with her hand on the banister . 267

"It was a great wrong I did you, Don; can you forgive me?" 325

"Tell me quick! How do you know about the shooting?" 395

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CHAPTER I

IT was springtime in Kentucky, gay, irresponsible, Southern springtime, that comes bursting impetuously through highways and byways, heedless of possible frosts and impossible fruitions. A glamour of tender new green enveloped the world, and the air was sweet with the odor of young and growing things. The brown river, streaked with green where the fresher currents of the creeks poured in, circled the base of a long hill that dominated the landscape from every direction.

In spite of the fact that impertinent railroads were beginning to crawl about its feet, and the flotsam and jetsam of the adjacent city were gradually being deposited at its base, it nevertheless reared its granite shoulders proudly and defiantly against the sky.

From the early days when the hill and rich surrounding farm lands had been granted to the old

pioneer William Carsey, one generation of Carseys after another had lived in the stately old mansion that now stood like the last remaining fortress against the city's invasion. Sagging cornices and discolored walls had not dispelled the atmosphere of contentment that enveloped the place, an effect heightened by the wide front porch which ran straight across the face of it, like a broad, complacent smile. Some old houses, like old gallants, bear an unmistakable air of past prosperity, of past affairs. Romance has trailed her garments near them and the fragrance lingers.

Thornwood, shabby and neglected, could still afford to drowse in the sunshine and smile over the past. It remembered the time when its hospitality was the boast of the countryside, when its stables held the best string of horses in the State; when its smokehouse, now groaning under a pile of lumber, sheltered shoulders of pork, and sides of bacon, and long lines of juicy, sugar-cured hams; when the cellar quartered battalions of cobwebby bottles that stood at attention on the low hanging shelves. It was a house ripe with experience and mellow with memories, a wise, old, sophisticated house, that had had its day, and enjoyed it, and now, through with ambitions, and through with striving, had settled down to a peaceful old age.

On this particular Sunday afternoon Colonel

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Bob Carsey, the third of his name, sat on the porch in a weather-beaten mahogany rocker, making himself a mint julep. He was a stout, elderly gentleman, and, like the rocking chair, was weather-beaten, and of a slightly mahogany hue. His features, having long ago given up the struggle against encroaching flesh, were now merely slight indentures, and mild protuberances, with the exception of the eyes which still blazed away defiantly, like twinkling lights at the end of a passage. Across his feet with nose on paws lay a dog, and about him was scattered a profusion of fishing paraphernalia.

The Colonel, carefully crushing the mint between his stubby fingers, stirred it with the sugar at the bottom of his tall glass; then, resting the concoction on the broad arm of the rocker, and without turning his head, lifted his voice in stentorian command:

"Jimpson!"

No answer. He turned his head slightly to the left, in the general direction of the negro cabins whose roofs could be seen through the trees, and sent another summons hurtling through the bushes:

"Jimpson!"

Again he waited, and again there was no response. The Colonel sighed resignedly, and spreading a large bordered handkerchief over his obliterated features, clasped his fat hands with some difficulty

about his ample girth, and slept. When he awoke he began exactly where he had left off, only this time turning his head slightly to the right, and sending his command toward the kitchen wing.

A door slammed somewhere in the distance, and presently a shuffling of feet was heard in the hall, and a small, alert old negro presented himself to his master with an air of cheerful conciliation.

The Colonel did not turn his head; he gazed with an air of great injury at the tops of the locust trees, clasping his tumbler as it rested on the arm of the rocker.

"Jimpson," he began, after the culprit had suffered his silence some minutes.

"Now, Cunnel," began Jimpson nervously. He had evidently rehearsed this scene in the past.

"Just answer my questions," insisted the Colonel. "*Is* this my house?"

"Yas, sir, but Carline, she—"

"And are you my nigger?" persisted the Colonel plaintively.

"Yas, sir; but you see, Carline—"

"And have n't I, for twenty years," persisted the Colonel, "been taking a mint julep at half past two on Sunday afternoons?"

"Yas, sir, I was a comin'—"

"Then you don't regard it as an unreasonable request, that a gentleman should ask his own nigger,

in his own house, to bring him a small piece of ice?" The Colonel's sense of injury was becoming so overpowering that the offender might have been crushed by contrition had not a laugh made them both look up.

Standing in the doorway was a young girl in a short riding habit, and a small hat of red felt that was carelessly pinned to her bright, tumbled hair. Her eyes were dark, and round like those of a child, and they danced from object to object as if eager to miss none of the good things that the world had to offer. Joy of life and radiant youth seemed to flash from her face and figure.

"What 's the matter, Squire Daddy?" she asked, pausing on the threshold. "Mad again?"

The Colonel's head twitched in her direction, but he held it stiff.

"Well, please don't kill Uncle Jimpson 'til he finds my gloves. I don't know where I took them off."

"Yas 'm, Miss Lady," Jimpson welcomed the diversion. "I 'll find 'em jes as soon as I git yer Paw his ice."

"Oh, Daddy 'll wait, won't you, Dad? I 'm in a hurry."

For a moment Jimpson and the Colonel eyed each other, then the Colonel's gaze shifted.

"I 'll git de ice fer you on my way back," Jimp-

son whispered reassuringly. "I spec' dat chile *is* in a hurry."

The young lady in question gave no appearance of haste as she perched herself on the arm of her father's chair, and presented a boot-lace for him to tie.

"Going fishing, Dad?" she asked.

"Yes," said the Colonel, struggling to make a two-loop bow-knot. "Noah Wicker and I are going down below the mill dam. Want to come along?"

"I can't. I 'm going riding."

"That 's good. Who with?"

"With Don Morley."

The smile that had returned to the Colonel's face during this conversation contracted suddenly, leaving his mouth a round little button of disapprobation.

"What in thunder is he doing up here anyhow; why don't he go on back to town where he belongs?"

"Don?" Miss Lady pretended to effect a part in the few straggling hairs that adorned his forehead. "Why, he 's staying over to the Wickers' while he looks around for a farm. Here 's a gray hair, Daddy! I 'd pull it out only there are two more on that other side now than there are on this."

"Buying a farm, is he?" The Colonel waxed a deeper mahogany. "Well, this place is not for

sale. I should think he could find something better to do with his time than hanging around here. For two weeks I have n't been able to sit on this porch for five minutes without having him under my feet! What 's the sense of his coming so often?"

Miss Lady caught him by the ears, and turned his irate face up to her own.

"He comes to see me!" she announced, emphasizing each word with a nod. "He likes horses and dogs and me, and I like horses and dogs and him. But I like you, too, Daddy."

The Colonel refused to be beguiled by such blandishments.

"I 'll speak to him when he comes. He need n't think just because he is a city fellow, he can take a daughter of mine racing all over the country on Sunday afternoon!"

"Why, Dad, that 's absurd! Don't you take me yourself almost every Sunday? And don't I go with Noah, and the Brooks boys whenever I like?"

"Well, you can't go to-day."

"But this is Donald's last day. He goes back to town to-night, and he may go abroad next week to stay ever and ever so long."

The Colonel brought his fist down on his knees: "I don't care a hang where he goes. It 's *you* we are talking about. You 've got to promise me not to go with him this afternoon."

"But why?"

"Because," the Colonel argued feebly, "because it's Sunday."

Miss Lady sat for a moment looking straight before her and there was a contraction of her lips that might have passed for a comic imitation of her father's had it not softened into a smile.

"Suppose I won't promise?" she said.

The Colonel's free hand gripped the arm of the chair, and he looked as if he had every intention in the world of being firm.

"You see, if it is wrong for me to go riding on Sunday," went on Miss Lady, "it's wrong for you to go fishing. Suppose we both reform and stay at home?"

The Colonel's eyes involuntarily flew to his cherished tackle, lying ready for action on the top step, then they came back with a snap to the top of a locust tree.

Miss Lady squeezed his arm and laughed: "Of course you don't want to stay at home this glorious afternoon, neither do I! Now, that's settled. Here comes Noah; I'll go and fix your lunch."

It was not by any means the first time the daughter of the house of Carsey had scored in a contest with her father. His subjection had begun on that morning now nearly twenty years ago, when she had been placed in his arms, a motherless bundle of

helplessness without even a personal name to begin life with.

That question of a name had baffled him. He had consulted all the neighbors, considered all the possibilities in the back of the dictionary, and even had recourse to the tombstones in the old cemetery, but the haunting fear that in days to come she might not like his choice, held him back from a final decision. In the meanwhile she was "The Little Lady," then "Lady," and finally through the negroes it got to be "Miss Lady." So the Colonel weakly compromised in the matter by deciding to wait until she was old enough to name herself. When that time arrived she stubbornly refused to exchange her nickname for a real one. A half-hearted effort was made to harness her up to "Elizabeth," but she flatly declined to answer to the appellation.

She and Noah Wicker, the son of a neighboring farmer, had run wild on the big place, and it was Miss Lady who invariably got to the top of the peach tree first, or dared to wade the farthest into the stream. All through the summer days her little bare legs raced beside Noah's sturdier brown ones. She could handle a fishing rod as well as her father, could ride and drive and shoot, and was on terms of easy friendship with every neighbor who passed over the brow of Billy-goat Hill.

The matter of education had been the first serious break in this idyllic existence. After romping through the country school, she had had several young and pretty governesses, all of whom had succumbed to the charms of neighboring country swains, and abandoned their young charge, to start establishments of their own. Then came wise counsel from without and after many tears she was sent to a boarding school in the city.

The older teachers at Miss Gibbs' Select School for Young Ladies still recall their trials during the one year Miss Lady was enrolled. She was pretty, yes, and clever, and lovable, oh, yes! And at this point usually followed a number of stories of her generosity and impulsive kindness; "but," the conclusion always ran, "such a strange, wild little creature, so intolerant of convention, in dress, in education, in religion. Quite impossible in a young ladies' seminary."

After one term of imprisonment Miss Lady escaped to the outdoor world again, and implored her devoted "Dad" to let her grow up in ignorance, protesting passionately that she did not want puffs on her head, and heels on her shoes, and whalebones about her waist. That she did n't care whether x plus y equaled z, or not, and that going to church and saying the same thing a dozen times, drove all ideas of religion out of her head. She would study

at home, she declared, anything, everything he suggested, if only she could do it, in her own way, out of doors.

So the sorely puzzled Colonel had procured her the necessary text-books, and she had plunged into her original method of self-education. She usually fought out her mathematical battles down by the river, using a stick on the sand for her calculations; history she studied in the fork of an old elm, declaiming the most dramatic episodes aloud, to the edification of the sparrows.

In the long winter months her favorite haunt was a little unused room over the front hall, traditionally known as the library. Its only possible excuse for the name was its one piece of furniture, a battered secretary containing a small collection of musty volumes that did credit to the taste of some long-departed Carsey.

Miss Lady had discovered the library in her paper-doll days, and had ruthlessly clipped small bonneted ladies with flounced skirts from magazines that dated back to the first year of publication. Later she had discovered that some of the ladies had jokes on their backs, or rather pieces of jokes, the rest of which she hunted up in the old magazines. It was an easy step from the magazines to the books, and in time she knew them all, from the little dog-eared copy of Horace in the upper left-

hand corner, to the fat Don Quixote in the lower right.

In this neglected little room, with its festoons of cobwebs, its musty smell and its sense of old, forgotten things and people, she would tuck herself away with a pocket full of apples, to study and read by the hour.

The Colonel had done his part, and she was determined to do hers; for three years she kept sturdily at it, devouring the things she could understand, and blithely skipping those she could not, extracting meanwhile a vast amount of pleasure out of each passing day. For the thing that differentiated Miss Lady from the rest of her fellow kind was that she was usually glad. She liked to get up in the morning and to go to bed at night, a peculiarity in itself sufficiently great to individualize her. She greeted each new experience with enthusiasm and managed to extract the largest possible quota of happiness out of the smallest and most insignificant occasion.

As she went singing through the hall, the Colonel tried to frown over his glasses, but he was only partially successful. She was too satisfying a sight with her shining hair and eyes, and lithe, supple figure, every motion of which bespoke that quick, unconscious freedom of body peculiar to children and those favored of the gods, who never grow old.

The tall, awkward young man who had by this

time arrived at the porch, followed the Colonel's gaze, and then, without speaking, sat down on the steps and clasped his hands about his knees. Noah Wicker's awkwardness, however manifest to others, was evidently a matter of small moment to him. He had apparently accepted the companionship of unmanageable arms and legs without question, and without embarrassment. His stubby blond hair rose straight from a high, broad forehead, and grew down in square patches in front of his ears. His eyes, small and steady, surveyed the world with profound indifference.

When Miss Lady disappeared the Colonel turned upon him suddenly:

"What about this rich young fellow over at your house? Who is he anyhow?"

"Morley?" Noah crossed his knees deliberately. "Why, he's a brother-in-law of Mr. Sequin."

"Not Basil Sequin, the president of the People's Bank! You don't say!" The Colonel paused for a moment to digest this fact, then he went on: "Hell-bent on farming I hear; wants your father to look around for a place."

This not being in the form of a question, Noah conserved his energies.

"Don't amount to a hill of beans, I'll warrant," continued the Colonel, with a watchful eye on Noah

for denial or confirmation, but Noah was noncommittal. "When a fellow gets to be twenty-three years old and can't find anything better to do than to run around the country spending his money, and playing with the girls, there 's a screw loose somewhere. What does he know about stock-farming?"

"Says he 's been reading up."

"Fiddlesticks!" roared the Colonel. "You can't learn farming out of a book! What does he know about horses?"

"Oh! He 's on to horses all right," Noah grinned ambiguously. "You and I could n't teach him anything about horses."

"Can he shoot?"

"Can't hit a barn door."

The Colonel heaved a deep sigh, drained the last drops from his tumbler, then leaned forward, confidentially:

"Noah Wicker, do you like that young chap?"

"Like him?" Noah looked up in surprise. "Why, everybody likes Don Morley."

"I don't," said the Colonel fiercely. "Here he comes now. I wish you 'd look at that!"

A headlong young man in model riding costume, astride a bob-tailed sorrel, rashly took a fence where gate there was none, and came cantering across the Colonel's favorite stretch of blue grass.

"Awfully sorry to have cut across, Colonel!" he

called out in tones that spoke little contrition. "Slipped my trolley as usual and got lost in the bullrushes. Hope I have n't kept Miss Lady waiting?"

The Colonel rose and extended a hand of welcome. A true Kentuckian may commit murder and still be a gentleman, but to fail in hospitality is to forfeit even his own self-respect.

"My daughter, Mr. Morley, will be out presently," he announced with great formality.

"And how are you, Mike?" went on young Morley, stooping to pat the dog; "did n't mean to cut you, old fellow, 'pon my word I did n't."

The dog, a shaggy beast, with small, plaintive eyes looking out from a fringe of wiry hair, expressed his appreciation of this attention with all the emotion a stump of tail would permit.

"It 's a bully day!" continued the visitor with enthusiasm, wiping his wrists and forehead, and tossing his hair back. "If I were n't going to town to-night I 'd ask you to take me fishing, Colonel. Hello! What kind of a reel is that?"

Now the article which had attracted attention happened to be an invention of the Colonel's, something he had been working on for a long time, so he could not resist explaining its unique qualities.

"Well, I 'll be hanged!" said Morley, turning it over and over admiringly. "If that is n't the clev-

erest thing I ever saw. This little screw regulates the slack, does n't it? Does your legal mind get on to that, Wick?"

"It was a great job to get that to fit," said the Colonel, flattered in spite of himself. "Took me the best part of a week to puzzle out that one point."

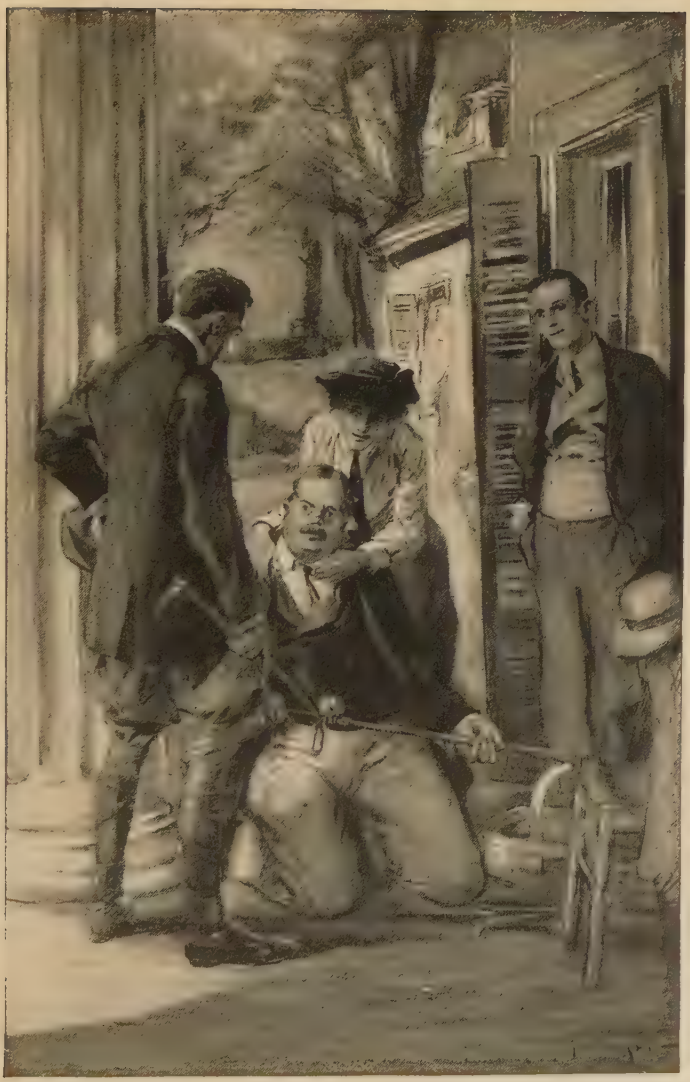
"A week!" exclaimed Morley. "It would have taken me months! Oh! here she is!" and from the very ardent look that leapt into his face, and the alacrity with which he sprang up, it might have been doubted whether his mind had been wholly upon the matter under discussion.

Miss Lady greeted him with almost boyish frankness, but there was an unmistakable flush under the smooth tan of her cheek that did not escape the vigilant eye of the Colonel.

"Here you are, Dad! here you are, Noah!" she said, tossing a small package to each; "sandwiches and hard boiled eggs for two."

"Put the salt in for the eggs?" asked the Colonel, having had experience with her lunches.

"I believe I did. Open yours and see, Noah. Say, Daddy darling!" she swooped down upon him from the rear, slipping an arm about his neck as he knelt on the porch to collect his hooks and lines, "you are going to let me ride Prince, just this once, are n't you?"



The Colonel leaned back upon his knees and glared at Morley.

The Colonel gasped, partly from strangulation, and partly from amazement.

"Prince!" he cried. "Well, I reckon not! That colt 's hardly broken to the saddle. He threw Jimpson last week."

"Well, I 'm not Jimpson. Please, Daddy, just this once."

"If that 's the little beast Wick was telling me about," said Morley, "we are certainly not going to trust you on him."

The Colonel leaned back upon his knees where he knelt on the porch, and glared at Morley.

"Who do you mean by we?"

"The conservative party of which I, for once, am a member. From all I can hear of that colt, no girl could handle him."

"You are absolutely mistaken, sir! I taught my daughter to straddle a horse before I taught her to walk. Handle him? Of course she can handle him! Jimpson!" he roared in conclusion, "put the side-saddle on Prince!"

CHAPTER II

THE Cane Run Road lay straight ahead, now white under the full light of the sun, now dappled with tiny dancing shadows from the interlaced twigs overhead, new clothed in their garb of green. White and purple violets peeped from the fence corners, and overhead the birds made busy in the branches.

Two young people, flushed and smiling, drew rein and looked at each other. In the eyes of each was a challenge.

"I'll race you to the mill!" cried Miss Lady, tugging at her bridle. "Don't start 'til I give the word. Now, go!"

Off through the smiling, sunlit fields they dashed, too impetuous and young, and gloriously free, to waste a thought on that inexorable wheel of life, upon which sooner or later the most irresponsible must break their wings. On and on they went, neck to neck, the gallop breaking into a run. Down past the blacksmith's, past the old mill which was to have been the goal, through the long covered bridge,

over the hill and out again on the level road where they still kept abreast.

And close upon them, with head up and mane flying, came another steed, free, irresponsible, unbridled, invisible. It was Romance, pounding in their wake; Romance, whose hoof beats made their pulses dance in unison, whose breath upon their cheeks made them laugh for joy in the face of the wind.

They were almost to the city now, having reached that slovenly suburb that had given its plebeian name to the once aristocratic neighborhood. Clouds of dust whirled in their wake, and stones flew right and left under the horses' hoofs; men in carts pulled their teams to the side of the road to let the mad pair pass; dogs dashed from dark doorways, barking furiously.

Suddenly, just as they neared the railroad junction, the sharp whistle of an engine sent Prince plunging into the air. Donald rose in his stirrups and made a frantic clutch at the horse's head, but even as he missed it, he heard the clanging signal for an approaching train and saw the gates immediately in front of them descending. Instantly he flung himself out of the saddle, and sprang for Prince's head. The horse, almost under the nose of the engine, reared frantically, swerved, then came to a trembling stand, as Miss Lady deftly loosened

her skirt from the pommel, and swung herself to the ground.

In a second Don was beside her.

"Are you hurt?" he cried, catching her arm with his free hand and looking anxiously into her face.

"Not a bit. Who won?" she asked with a little catch in her voice.

"Lord! You were plucky! If anything had happened to you!" his hand tightened on her wrist, and he drew in his breath sharply.

The afternoon freight came lumbering by, and they stood close together with the hot breath of the engine in their faces. Her hair blew across his face and he could feel her body trembling against his shoulder. Neither of them seemed to be aware of the fact that he still held her hand, and that the horses were tugging at their respective bridles.

As the train thundered past and the gates lifted, Miss Lady turned quickly and began to pin up her loosened hair.

"Pretty narrow shave, Miss," commented a red-headed man with a flag, hurrying across the track, and joining an old apple-woman and two small boys who constituted an interested audience.

"I seen you a-coming an' would 'a' let you through, only I 'm a-substitutin' on this job, and was n't in fer takin' no extry risks."

"Here, boy!" cried Donald, "hold my horse.

The girth 's broken; I 'll have to make another hole in the strap."

The word "boy" being a generic term was promptly appropriated by each of the youngsters as applying to himself, and a fierce scramble ensued in which the larger was victorious.

"Skeeter 's it," announced the flagman, a self-constituted umpire. "Git out 'er the way there, Chick, and give the gent a chanct to see what he 's a-doin'."

Chick, a large-headed, small-bodied goblin of a boy, made an unintelligible, guttural sound in his throat and remained where he was, evidently considering it of paramount importance that *he* should see what the gentleman was doing.

It was with some difficulty that the new hole in the strap was made, and to secure the buckle more firmly Don gave it several sharp raps with the handle of his riding whip. At the last one the silver knob flew from the handle and rolled to the roadside.

In an instant the small boys were after it, the older having deserted his post without compunction, when a question of booty was involved. They grappled together in the dust of the road, long before they reached the prize, and with arms and legs entwined rolled toward it.

Chick was underneath when they arrived, but he

loosened his clutch of Skeeter's throat, and darted forth a small, grimy hand that closed upon the treasure. In an instant Skeeter seized upon the clenched fist, and was wrenching it open, when a third party entered the fray.

"The little one got it!" cried Miss Lady indignantly; "he got it first! Give it to him this minute!"

"I be damned if I do!" shouted Skeeter, roused to fury by the combat.

"I 'll be damned if you don't," said Miss Lady, equally determined.

The skirmish was fierce but short, and by the time Don got to them, Miss Lady had restored the spoils to the lawful victor, and was assisting the vanquished foe to wipe the dust from his eyes.

"Well, partner," said Donald to Chick, "what have you got to say to the young lady for taking your part?"

"He ain't got nothin' to say," said Skeeter glibly. "He 's dumb. Nobody but me can't understand him. He says thank you, ma'am."

Chick having uttered no sound, it was evident that Skeeter depended upon telepathy.

"He 's a ash-barrel baby," went on Skeeter, eager to impart information; "he ain't got no real folks, and he 's been to the Juvenile Court twict; onct for

hopping freights and onct fer me and him smashin' winders."

All eyes were turned upon the hero, who immediately became absorbed in his whip-handle. He was small, and exceedingly thin, and exceedingly dirty. The most conspicuous things about him were his large, wistful eyes, and his broad smile that showed where his teeth were going to be. Across his narrow chest a ragged elbowless coat was hitched together by one button, while a pair of bare, spindling legs dwindled away respectively into a high black shoe, and a low-cut tan one, both of which were well ventilated at the heels.

"I don't believe he 's very bad," smiled Miss Lady, catching his chin in her hand and turning his face up to hers. "Are you, Chick?"

He made a queer guttural sound in his throat but, his official interpreter being by this time absorbed in the horses, was unable to make himself understood.

"It must be awful for a boy not to be able to ask questions!" she went on, looking down at him, then seeing something in his face that other people missed, she suddenly drew him to her and gave him a little motherly squeeze.

The ride home was somewhat leisurely, for the accident, slight as it was, had sobered the riders, and there was, moreover, a subject under discussion that

called for considerable earnest expostulation on one side, and much tantalizing evasion on the other.

"It all depends upon you," Donald was saying, as they climbed the last hill. "Cropsie Decker starts for the coast to-morrow but the steamer does n't sail for ten days. Shall I go or stay?"

"But you were so mad about it two weeks ago, you could scarcely wait to start."

"Lots of things can happen in two weeks. Shall I stay?"

"What do your family think about it?"

"My family? Oh, you mean my sister. She does n't make a habit of losing sleep over my affairs. She 'd probably say go. I am rather unpopular with her just now, because I don't approve of this affair between my niece Margery and Fred Dillingham. I fancy she 'd be rather relieved to get me out of the way. In fact, everybody says go, except Doctor Queerington. He is a cousin of ours, used to be my English professor, up at the university. He has always harbored the illusion that I can write. Wants me to settle down some place in the country and go at it in earnest."

"You don't mean John Jay Queerington, the author?" Miss Lady said eagerly. "Is he really your cousin? Daddy went to school to his father, and has told me so much about him, that without seeing him, I could write a book on the subject."

"Great old chap in his way, an authority on heaven knows how many subjects, yet he scarcely makes enough money to take care of his children."

"But think of the books he is giving to the world! He told Daddy he was on his thirteenth volume!"

"Yes, he swims around most of the time in a sea of declensions, conjugations, and syntaxes, in Greek, Latin and English."

"I think he's magnificent!" cried Miss Lady, trying to hold Prince down to a walk. "I adore people who do great things and amount to something."

"All of which I suppose is meant to reflect on a poor devil who doesn't do things and doesn't amount to anything?"

"I never said so."

"See here," said Donald whimsically, "for two weeks you have been getting me *not* to do things. When I think of all the things I have promised you, I can feel my hair turning white. Having polished me off on the don'ts, you aren't going to begin on the do's, are you?"

"Indeed I am. Does Doctor Queerington really think you could be a writer?"

"He has been after me about it ever since I was a youngster. I'm always scribbling at something, but there is nothing in it. Besides," he added with a smile, "I'm going to be a farmer."

Miss Lady threw back her head and laughed:

"He wants to be a farmer
And with the farmers stand
The hay seed on his forehead
And a rake within his hand.

Oh! Don Morley, one minute it 's the Orient, the next it 's literature, and the next a farm; you don't know what you want!"

"Yes, I do, too," he caught her bridle and brought the horses close together. "I know perfectly what I want, and so do you. Have n't I told you four times a day for two weeks?"

She looked away to the far horizon where a bank of formidable clouds was forming:

"Oh, we all think we want things one day and forget about them the next. Life is made up of desires that seem big and vital one minute, and little and absurd the next. I guess we get what 's best for us in the end."

"I have n't so far!" Don said fiercely. "I 've gotten what was worst for me and I 've made the worst of it."

They had turned into the lane now and were walking their horses up to the stile where Jimpson was waiting to take them.

"Don't put my mare up," directed Donald. "I 've got to ride back to town to-night. There 's

rain in those clouds; I ought to be starting this minute."

But his haste was evidently not imperative, for he followed Miss Lady through the narrow winding paths, between a tangle of shrubs and vines, into the old-fashioned flower garden. The spiræa was just putting out its long, feathery plumes of white, and the lilacs nodded white and purple in the breeze.

"Here's the first wild rose!" cried Miss Lady, darting to a corner of the old stone wall; "the idea of its daring to come out so soon!"

He took the frail little blossom and smiled at it half quizzically: "It's funny," he said awkwardly, "your giving me this. You know, it's what you made me think of, the first time I saw you,— a wild rose. Did n't she, Mike?"

Mike, who had been dreaming all afternoon on the porch, had gotten up reluctantly as they passed and followed them. He had a slow, lopsided gait, and his tongue dangled from the side of his mouth. It was evidently a sacrifice for him to accompany them, but duty was duty.

"You angel dog! Come here to your Missus!" commanded Miss Lady, as she and Donald dropped down in the old barrel-stave hammock, that had swung beneath the lilacs since the Colonel was a boy.

But Mike ambled past her, and after snuggling

up to Don with a great show of intimacy lay down at his feet.

"I 'm glad somebody loves me," Donald said.

"It 's your riding boots, Mike likes. He never had a chance to taste tan shoe polish before!"

"What do you like me for?"

"Me? Who said I did?"

"Don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I like tan boots, too. Why did n't you tell me my hair had tumbled down again?"

"Because you are so beautiful, with it like that, Miss Lady —"

"Now, Don, if you begin again I shall go straight in the house. What did you mean by saying you had gotten what was worst for you, and you had made the worst of it?"

"Oh, the way I 've been brought up. You see my sister took me when I was a baby, and I guess I was an awful nuisance to her. She liked to travel, and kept it up a good while even after Margery was born. I grew up in hotels and on steamers and trains, going to school wherever we happened to be staying long enough; sometimes in France, sometimes in Switzerland, sometimes in America. I remember one Christmas when I was about six, we were in a hotel in Paris. My nurse put me to bed early so she could go out with her sweetheart, and told me there was n't any Santa Claus, so I would n't

stay awake watching for him. I hate that woman to this day! I can remember the big, lonesome room, and the red curtains, and the crystal chandelier and the way I cried because there was n't any Santa Claus, and because I did n't have a sweetheart!"

"Poor little chap! It was a mother you wanted."

"Perhaps. Sister was good to me. But she did n't understand me; she never has. She has always given me too much of everything, advice included."

"But since you have been grown, you 've had lots of time to — to — take things into your own hands."

"Well, I did for a while. I managed to squeeze through the university, then I went into the shops and had a bully time for five months, but it made no end of a row! Sister felt that after all she had done for me, I ought n't to go dead against her wishes, and I guess she was right. Then I went into the bank and was beginning to get the hang of things, when she had a nervous collapse and was ordered to Egypt for the winter. My brother-in-law could n't take her, so he sent me."

"But you stayed longer than she did."

"Yes, I played around on the Riviera for a while."

"And you have been home, how long?"

"Three months. Honestly, I meant to buckle

down to something right off, but Cropsie Decker got this offer to go to the Orient for the *Herald-Post,* and asked me to go along. I was keen about it until — until I came down here."

They were both silent for a while, watching a spider that was exploring Don's boot-lace.

"It all seems so footless now. What I want is a house of my own, a home, I mean. I never had much of that sort of thing — I 'm not quite sure I knew what a home was until I saw Thornwood."

"Is n't it dear?" asked Miss Lady with a loving look over her shoulder at the old house silhouetted against the sky. "I could kiss every brick of it, I love it so."

"I wish I did n't have to go back to town to-night!" burst out Donald inconsequentially. "I wish I never had to go back to it!"

"Why?"

"Oh, for lots of reasons. I 'm a different fellow down here in the country, with things to do, and the right sort of things to think about, and — and you! You see," he smiled without looking up, "I 'm not much good in town."

"How do you mean?" asked Miss Lady, with disconcerting frankness.

Donald shrugged his broad shoulders: "Oh! I don't know. I get into things before I know it. This Eastern trip, now; it sounded great when I said

I 'd go, Cropsie is a regular bird, the best fellow in the world to go on such a lark with, but —"

Miss Lady shot a glance at the handsome, boyish, irresponsible face beside her.

"Don't go, Don!" she whispered impulsively; "stay here and buy your farm!"

"You mean it!" he demanded, seizing her hands. "You want me to stay?"

The blood surged into her cheeks, but she did not withdraw her hands. Into her eager, luminous eyes had leapt the response that had been held in abeyance all afternoon.

"If I stay," he pressed hotly, "if I settle down and behave myself, and make good, you 'll promise me —"

"Jimpson!" thundered a familiar voice from the road. "That good-for-nothing, lazy nigger, why don't he come help me with these things? Jimpson!"

"I 'll tell him, Dad!" called Miss Lady, springing from the hammock.

"But wait!" pleaded Donald, "just a minute. I 've got to beat that storm to town, and tell Decker the trip is off. But I 'll be back in the morning! Perhaps to breakfast. Oh, my darling, I am so happy! Say you love me! Say it!"

Old Mike stirred in his slumbers, then opened one eye. It was evidently time for him to take some

action. When two young people are standing very close with clasped hands and love-lit eyes in the dim fragrance of an old garden, even a dog of a chaperon knows that it is time to interfere! With great presence of mind he discovered an imaginary squirrel in the hedge directly beside them, and set up such a furious barking that Miss Lady looked around and laughed. For a second she stood, her head thrown back, a teasing, half-shy, half-daring look on her face, then she dropped a swift kiss on the hand that clasped hers, and without a word went flying crimson-cheeked up the lilac-bordered path.

CHAPTER III

DONALD MORLEY rode back to town through the coming storm, in that particular state of ecstasy that mortals are permitted to enjoy but once in a lifetime. Not that falling in love was a novel sensation; on the contrary a varied experience had made him agreeably familiar with all the symptoms. But this, he assured himself with passionate vehemence, was something altogether and absolutely different. Between now and that morning when he had idly ridden out to Wicker's in search of a farm, lay a sea as wide as Destiny!

There in the country he had unexpectedly come upon his fate and with characteristic impetuosity had pursued and overtaken it. Other girls may have stirred his heart, but it had remained for a wild little pagan of the woods to stir his soul. He had laid bare to her the most secret places of his being, had confessed his sins, and received absolution. From this time on the frivolities of youth lay behind him, and ambition sat upon his brow. He would cut out the trip to the Orient, buy a farm and settle down to work as if he had n't a penny in the world.

Once the Colonel was made to recognize his worth, the gates of Paradise would be open!

He thought of the home he would build for her, and the flowers that would encompass it, of the horses and dogs they would have and perhaps— The memory of her face as she clasped Chick in the road flashed over him, and he straightened his shoulders suddenly and smiled almost tremulously. Yes, he'd be worthy of her, from this time forward life should hold no higher privilege!

It was after seven o'clock by the time he reached the Junction, and heavy mutterings of thunder could be heard in the west.

"Does this street go through to the boulevard?" he asked of a man, pointing with his knobless whip.

The lank person addressed removed his weight from the telegraph pole that had supported it and sauntered forward. As he did so Donald recognized the red-headed umpire of the afternoon.

"No, sir, Captain," he said, "it do not. This here is Bean Alley. These city politicians has got their own way of running streets; they take a pencil you see and draw a line along the property of folks that can pay for streets. The balance of us sets in mud puddles." The man evidently found some difficulty in expressing himself without the assistance of profanity. There were blanks left between the words, which he supplied mentally with compressed

lips and lifting of shaggy brows, that served as an effective substitute. His conversation printed would resemble these grammatical exercises, struggled with an early youth, in which "a —— dog —— attacked a —— boy with a —— stick."

But his suppressed eloquence was lost upon his hearer, for Donald had become absorbed in a theatrical poster, which represented a preternaturally slim young lady, poised on a champagne bottle, coyly surveying an admiring world through the extended fingers of a small black gloved hand. It was "La Florine," whose charms he had heard recounted times without number by Mr. Cropsie Decker.

This evening, the poster announced, "La Florine" would for the first time in any American city, perform her incomparable dance, "The Serpent of the Nile."

Don had consulted his watch, and made a lightning calculation as to the time in which he could get a bite of supper and reach the Gayety, before he remembered that he was a reformed character. Then he sternly withdrew his gaze from the lady who peeped through her fingers in the dusk, and brought it back to the red-headed person, who had continued his conversation with unbroken volubility.

"... and she says to me," he was concluding

"'Mr. Flathers,' she says, 'it's a privelege to help such as you. A man what's been in the gutter times without number, and bore the awful horrors of delirium tremins four times and still can feel the stirrings of Christianity in his bosom.'"

Donald looked at him and laughed. Here was evidently a fellow sinner.

"So you've straightened up, have you? How does it feel?"

Mr. Flathers cast a sidelong glance upward as if to size up the handsome young gentleman on horseback.

"Mighty depressin'," he confessed, "with a thirst that's been accumulatin' for weeks and weeks, and a sick wife, and a adobted child that ain't spoke a word for seven years. But I'm restin' on the Lord. He well pervide."

"Oh, you'll get along!" said Don, feeling uncommonly lenient toward his fellow men. "Here's a dollar if that will help you out a bit."

"It will," said Mr. Flathers reassuringly; "it undoubedly will. I got much to be thankful for, I know that. Fer instance I never was a poor relation! That's more than lots of men kin say! The fact are, there ain't airy one in my whole family connection what's got any more 'n I have!"

The shower that had been threatening began now in earnest, and Donald started toward town at a

brisk canter, but before he had gone two squares the rain was driving in sheets across the street, and he was obliged to dismount and seek shelter in the doorway of an isolated building that stood at the end of the common. It was a double door with the upper parts in colored glass, on which was boldly lettered,

The CANT-PASS-IT SALOON.

In one of the windows a placard informed the famishing residents of Billy-goat Hill that their thirst might not be assuaged until after twelve o'clock on Sunday night.

As Donald stood in the doorway, an automobile turned the corner and came to a stop, the lights from the lamps shining on the wet street, and throwing everything outside their radius into sudden darkness.

A man got out of the machine and ran for shelter. He was coughing, and held his collar close about his throat.

"Why, hello, Dillingham," said Morley, recognizing him. "How did you get out here?"

"Joy-riding," said Dillingham with a curl of his lip. "Tried to make a short cut, and got marooned. What are you doing here?"

"I 've been out in the country for a couple of

weeks. Got caught in the shower. What 's the matter? Are you sick?"

Dillingham was leaning against the door jamb, shivering. He was a short, sallow, delicate-looking young fellow with self-explanatory puffs under his somewhat prominent eyes.

"Chilled to the bone," he chattered. "I 've got to get something to warm me up. Is this a saloon?"

"Yes, but it 's closed. Won't be open until midnight."

Mr. Dillingham made a sweeping condemnation of a city administration that would countenance such a proceeding, then set his wits to work to evade the law.

"Whose joint is this, anyhow?" he asked, glancing up. "Sheeley's? Why, of course. I 've been out here to prize fights. He lives somewhere around here. Ugh! but I 'm cold. I 'll be a corpse this time next week if I don't head off this chill. Let 's look him up and get a drink."

Donald hesitated to spring the news of his reformation upon one who was already in a weakened condition. He assured himself that he would refuse when the time came. In the meanwhile no reason presented itself for refusing to assist his friend in quest of a life-preserver.

"Sheeley used to live in one of those shacks over there. It 's letting up a bit, suppose we go over?"

proposed Dillingham, shaking the water out of his cap.

"Been out to the house to-day?" asked Donald as they splashed through the mud.

"Just came from there. The truth is Margery and I have fixed things up at last. Any congratulations?"

"To be sure," said Donald, extending a wet hand, but frowning into the darkness. "Have you told my sister?"

"Mrs. Sequin?" Dillingham smiled with superior amusement. "I guess she didn't have to be told. I imagine she thought of it before we did. Rather keen on me, you know, from the start."

Donald drew in his breath but said nothing. Had it not been true, how he would have enjoyed punching Dill's head!

"You get off to the Orient this week, I suppose," went on Dillingham. "Lucky devil! Decker asked me to go along. If it had n't been for the paternal grandparent I 'd have gone in a minute, but he put his foot down. When do you sail?"

"I 've given up the trip. I 'm going to buy a farm out near the Wickers', and get down to work."

Dillingham whistled incredulously:

"Yes, I see you doing it! You are counting on pulling off the Derby, I suppose?"

"No, I 'm not going to enter my horse."

"What! Why Lickety-Split could win that race in a walk. All the crowd say you stand to win. Here, this is the shanty; at least it 's where he used to live."

A bright light streamed from the uncurtained window of a small cottage, revealing a family group within. A fat, smiling woman in curl papers, with a baby in her arms, and six youngsters in varying stages of Sabbath cleanliness, hung upon the words of a man who sat in a large, plush self-rocker, and read from a highly colored picture book. In the head of the family Dillingham recognized Richard Sheeley, ex-pugilist, and present proprietor of the Cant-Pass-It.

"Well, if it ain't Mr. Dillingham!" exclaimed Sheeley, throwing open the door in answer to their knock. "Soaked through, ain't you? Little somethin' to warm you up? Sure. Just come in and wait 'til I git on my shoes and find an umbrella and I 'll go over with you. Don't keep a drop here," he added in a whisper, behind a hand so large that he evidently regarded it as sound proof. "Missus won't stand fer it, 'count of the kids, eh?"

"That 's him, Ma, the one I was telling you about," Richard Sheeley, Jr.,— yclept "Skeeter"— tugged at his mother's sleeve, nodding his head at Donald, who was making love to the smallest and shyest of the daughters of the house.

"She ain't as meek as she looks!" Mrs. Sheeley was saying, as she tried to get the child from behind her skirts. "She 's got her popper's temper along with his smartness. They ain't either one of them got a grain of sense when they git mad. I never seen a child with such a temper, did you, Popper?"

But Sheeley did not heed her; he was busy doing the honors to one he evidently considered an honored guest.

"Sit right down here, Mr. Dillingham, lemme take the book out of the chair. I was just reading to the Missus and the kids a book Skeeter brought home from Sunday School, all about Dan'l and the lions' den. Tall tale that, Mr. Dillingham. About one of the raciest animal articles I ever come acrost."

When they were ready to go, Mrs. Sheeley followed them anxiously to the door.

"It 's a awful stormy night, Popper; you ain't going to stay, are you?"

"Not long. I 'll be back to finish the story. So long, kids!" He swung himself down the wooden steps, between his two well-groomed companions, looking back now and then at the bright, open doorway, where the smiling fat woman stood surrounded by half a dozen tow-headed children.

Just as they reached the saloon, the storm, which

had evidently only paused for breath, broke in all its fury. The thunder rolled nearer and flashes of lightning pierced the darkness.

"Here! The side door!" shouted Sheeley. "Wait till I strike a match. I 'll take the umbrella. Go right up-stairs, if you don't mind. I want you to see the improvements I been making. There ain't a saloon this side the city limits that 's got the 'quipment for sparring matches mine has."

"Get busy with some whisky in the meanwhile," reminded Dillingham sharply; "and I say, can't you make a fire somewhere? I 'm chattering like an idiot."

"Sure I can. There 's a stove up there, and a bottle or two of extra fine liquor. Jes' step right up."

Half way up the ill-lighted stairs they paused. Above the wind and the rain, a curious sound had come from below as if someone had stumbled against something.

"Who is that?" Sheeley demanded sharply, leaning over the banister and peering down into the gloom.

No answer came, but a draught of wind blew in from somewhere, swaying the gas-jet.

"Oh! it 's a window that 's left open," said Sheeley. "That fool bartender! I 'll just go down and fasten it."

The lock proved stubborn, and it was with some difficulty that he forced it into place. Meanwhile the two young men had lit the gas in the large upper room and were inspecting the elevated stage where boxers were wont to engage surreptitiously in the noble art of self-defense.

"Take yours straight I believe, Mr. Dillingham?" said Sheeley, rejoining them; "an' yer gentleman friend?"

"Nothing for me," said Morley with unnecessary firmness. "I'll just wait a second until the storm lets up, then be off to town."

"Do any boxing these days, Dick?" asked Dillingham, pouring himself a second drink of whisky, as he hovered over the newly kindled fire.

"Oh! I don the mitts occasionally to gratify me friends. My long suit these days is faro; more money in it."

Donald, standing at the window, staring out at the wild night, drummed impatiently on the pane.

"Hurry up, Dill," he said. "I don't want to keep my mare standing so long in the rain."

"Your mare be hanged," said Dillingham; "just wait ten minutes until I get thawed out, and I'll go with you."

Donald had waited ten minutes for Dill before, but never with the present sense of responsibility, born of his new connection with the family. He

knew that his only chance of getting him home was to humor him.

How the wind whistled across the window! He wondered what Miss Lady was doing? Was she sitting by the table in the cozy living-room at Thornwood, with the lamplight on her hair? Was she at the harpsichord, singing to the Colonel? Was she standing, as he was standing, at the window, peering out into the wild night, and thinking,— and longing —?

"What 's the matter with a little game of poker?" asked Sheeley, lightly running a deck of cards up the length of his arm and reversing them with a deftness that spoke of long familiarity.

"Great idea!" exclaimed Dillingham expansively. "Just pass that bottle, will you? What 's that, Morley? Have n't got time? What in thunder 's the matter with you to-night?"

Donald retorted, with great dignity, that nothing in thunder was the matter with him, except that he wanted to get back to town.

"Better not start with it storming like this," urged Sheeley, as a crash of thunder shook the windows. "It 'll let up soon."

"Tell you what I 'll do!" said Dillingham, putting an arm across Donald's shoulder affectionately, and speaking a trifle unsteadily. "If you 'll play a couple of games I 'll go home with you —

You ought to be willing to do that for a fellow that 's going to be your uncle. I mean your nephew."

"And you 'll go the minute the rain lets up?"

"Yes, if you 'll play with us."

Donald stood irresolute, watching Dillingham's thin, unsteady fingers shuffle the cards. He must get him home somehow, for Margery's sake. Dill never knew when to stop, he was good for the night unless somebody intervened.

Sheeley caught his eye and nodded significantly.

"All right!" said Donald, dropping into the vacant chair. "Only two games remember! No whisky, thanks. What 's the ante?"

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Miss Lady had championed the cause of the oppressed that afternoon, she had unknowingly spoiled a criminal in the making. Chick Flathers, at the advanced age of eleven, had been so impressed by the injustice of social conditions that he had dedicated himself to a life of crime. He had already achieved two appearances in the Juvenile Court, and two days in the Detention Home. He was now fully decided to be a burglar.

To be sure there were extenuating circumstances for Chick. It was unquestionably a handicap to have opened his eyes for the first time in an ash barrel, and in Mr. Flathers' ash barrel at that. The transfer in a patrol wagon to an incubator in the City Hospital had been the next move, hence back to Mr. Flathers' who, inasmuch as it was *his* ash barrel, felt called upon by Providence to adopt the foundling.

The next misfortune that befell him was in being dropped out of the window on his head, during one of Maria Flathers' absent-minded moments. This apparently did not affect his head, but in time it se-

riously affected his speech. The fact that he had so much to say, without being able to say it, resulted in a dammed-up current that sometimes overflowed in temper and viciousness. He talked a great deal, but nobody was able, or took the pains to try, to understand him. That is, not until Skeeter Sheeley gave him his nickname and became his official interpreter.

Their friendship dated from a memorable day when Skeeter had for the first time heard of the incubator incident, and had promptly accosted the Flathers' foundling as "Chicken." The insult had been instantly resented in a battle so fierce and so bloody, that the details of it became historic in the annals of Billy-goat Hill. Chick, though of lighter weight, and feeble muscle, was armed with righteous indignation. He observed no rules, but fought with arms, legs, teeth and nails. The odds were against him however, and he had to be assisted from the field, a vanquished hero.

From that time on, by one of those mysterious laws that govern boydom, the two were inseparable companions, waging open war on all adjoining neighborhoods, engaging in predatory expeditions in their own, and, when interest in life flagged, fighting each other.

Skeeter interpreted all that Chick said, interpreted it freely, and with imagination, and Chick

apparently considered himself honor bound to accept the interpretation and stand for it, no matter how far it came from expressing his meaning.

Eleven years of wickedness had thus been swaggered through when Chick suddenly and unexpectedly fell in love. It was when the beautiful young lady at the railroad crossing had bent above him like a succoring angel, that he had been forced to change his classification of the human race. Hitherto it had been divided into grown people and children, henceforth it was divided into men and women!

All that Sunday afternoon he went about in a dream. He could not get over the fact that she had taken his part, that she had put her arm around him, and smiled at him. Once or twice when nobody was looking, he put his very dirty hand on his cheek and felt the spot where her fingers had rested.

But this new and tender emotion was not allowed to interfere with the special project that Chick had in mind. It was a project so colossal in its nature, that not even Skeeter was to be admitted to the secret. For six weeks Chick had been the victim of a gaming system, and to-night he was to take his revenge.

At supper time Skeeter recognized a convention of civilization and repaired to the bosom of his

family, but Chick being accountable to nobody, and recognizing no conventions, stole a couple of apples from a passing cart, and repaired to the dump heap to wait for the dark.

He had not long to wait, for great black clouds were covering the sky, and he could no longer see the houses at the end of the alley. Carefully storing his apple cores in his pocket for future trades, he picked his way over the tin cans and debris, until he reached the Junction. Here he hesitated. It was there that he and Skeeter had tussled for the whip. It was here that the young lady had come to his rescue, and said she did n't believe he was so very bad. Gee! but she was a pretty young lady, and her hand was so soft, and her voice —

Chick rammed his hands in his pockets and pulled his cap over his eyes. This was no way for a cove to be feeling when he had a job to do! With watchful eyes for passers-by, he slipped through an opening in the fence, and entered the switch-yard. When he emerged he staggered under the weight of a crowbar which he vainly tried to hide under his ragged jacket.

Just at the intersection of Bean Alley and the switch-yard, where the dusk banked up densely in the corners, he stopped again. He was watching his chance to get across the wide common, undetected. Twice he started, and twice he shrank back and

flattened himself against the wall as some one passed.

If, to the casual observer, Chick was but a dirty, ragged little boy, undersized and underfed, and rather frightened, to himself at least he was a bold desperado, about to avenge himself for a wrong committed.

Thunder muttered ominously, and a drop of rain fell on his face as he skirted the common, and reached the big, dark saloon at the cross-roads. Skirting the side wall, he crept to the rear, and felt for the open window which he had discovered earlier in the day. It was a low window and easy of access, and he lost no time in climbing in.

The passage was in utter darkness, but he felt his way along the wall until he reached a door. Here he fumbled for the knob and opened it. A street lamp outside threw a dim, wavering light into the room, revealing the long bar with its shining fixtures.

Chick put down his crowbar and tremblingly removed his coat. According to the moving pictures of criminals, that was the first move. Then he resolutely grasped his weapon and with thumping heart approached his enemy.

It appeared a very innocent enemy as it stood there in the half light, announcing in printed letters across its face, that seven out of every ten persons

who put a nickel in the slot, received a prize in money. But Chick knew that it lied! Had it not eaten up his nickels week after week? Had he not worked for it, fought for it, and bled for it, confidently believing that the prize would be his? And there it stood gorged with his precious nickels, mysterious and fascinating still, but treacherous through and through!

In a blaze of wrath Chick dealt it a sounding blow with the crowbar, then crouched in terror for what might happen. There was no sound but the dash of rain against the windows, and the heavy rumble of thunder overhead. Once more Chick grasped his heavy weapon and began the attack in earnest. Blow followed blow, as fast as his small arms could swing the crowbar. Suddenly a spring seemed to snap, and out poured a stream of money that rolled about his feet, and off into the farthest corners of the room.

Chick crouched on the floor, overcome by his exertions and the success of his venture. Wealth was within his reach, more wealth than he had ever dreamed of! Not unintelligible gold and silver, but dear, familiar nickels, whose purchasing power he knew. But no thought of appropriation crossed his mind as he knelt there, fingering the glittering pile. He was carefully counting out his rightful share, the eleven nickels that the slot machine had stolen

from him, and his hesitation came from the fact that he was trying to select the shiniest ones!

Having gotten what he came for, he once more shouldered his crowbar, and let himself out into the dark passage. Here he stopped in terror! Something was snorting and hissing without, something that sounded as if it *might* be the Devil!

In Chick's creed there was but one affirmation. He believed absolutely in the Devil. He knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was red, and cloven-footed and that his tail ended in a hard, sharp, spike, like Mammy Flathers' ice-pick. He also knew that when he breathed, it was in groans and hisses, such as he was hearing at the present moment. Chick's hair would have risen on his head, it wanted to, but it was not long enough.

For a moment he stood breathless, then he drew a sigh of relief. It was n't anything but an automobile after all! He tiptoed to a window and peered out. The lamps from the machine threw long lights across the shining wet street, but nothing else was visible.

After a long while he heard voices at the side door. Somebody was coming into the saloon! He could hear the doorknob turning, and a key in the latch. He started back to the barroom, then remembering a little closet under the steps where he and Skeeter used to play, he felt along the wall.

There it was! And just in time for him to stumble in and pull the door to, leaving enough crack to breathe through, in case his breath ever came back.

The side door was flung open, and the sputter of a match was followed by the feeble light from a gas-jet at the end of the passage.

"Here, I'll take the umbrella!" said a voice he dreaded next to the Devil's. It was Sheeley; he would go into the barroom, and discover the wreckage of the slot-machine! Chick was beginning to feel the handcuffs on his wrists, when he became aware of ascending footsteps overhead. What were they going up-stairs for? Was it a sparring match? Forgetting his precarious position he leaned forward to listen, upsetting a box on the shelf beside him.

"Who's that?" came in Sheeley's fiercest tones from the stairway above, and Chick cowered back into the dark with chattering teeth. Then he heard him say something about the window, and followed the sound of his heavy footsteps down the stairs and up again.

Now was his chance to escape while they were up-stairs. With utmost caution he pushed open the closet door, and on hands and knees began his perilous journey to the window. It was at that moment that he decided positively that he would

not be a burglar. A plumber took fewer risks, and made more money. Once at the window he was unable to budge the lock. Standing on the sill, whimpering with fear, he wrestled with it frantically, bruising his fingers, and tearing his nails, but he could not move it. Then he tried the door but Sheeley had evidently locked it and taken out the key.

A blinding flash of lightning sent him scurrying back to his hiding-place, where he sank on the floor, shivering and cringing. Nearer and nearer roared the thunder, and the wind seemed as anxious to get into the house as he was eager to get out of it. Gradually his arms and legs ceased jerking, his head relaxed against an empty box, he laid his hand against the cheek that had been patted and forgot his troubles in sleep.

When he awoke he heard loud voices overhead. At first he supposed he was at home, and that the voice was only Mr. Flathers enjoying one of his periodical backslidings. But Dick Sheeley's voice recalled him; Dick was mad at somebody, and when Dick got mad he fought. Not a boy on Billy-goat Hill but would have faced death to see the ex-prize-fighter in a row. It was a distinction that placed one at a bound in the front ranks of juvenile aristocracy.

Chick crept from his hiding-place and listened.

The voices grew louder and more excited. Drawn as by a magnet he slipped up the stairs step by step. At the top was an off-set in the hall, a corner in which he could hide, unseen from the open door beyond. There he lay on his stomach and wriggled forward until his eye was on a line with the crack in the half-open door.

Three men were sitting around a card table, two of them with their backs to him; and Dick facing them with his jaw set and his teeth showing. All three were talking at once, and Dick was the most excited of the three.

"You did n't have no ace of spades to show down! You discarded it. You know you did, you — cheat!" He had risen and was shaking his fist in the face of the thin young man.

"It 's a lie, you common cur!" cried the other wildly, but before the words were well out of his mouth, Sheeley's mighty right arm had shot out across the table and struck him in the face.

"Sheeley! For God's sake, don't you see Dillingham's drunk?" protested the other young man whom Chick recognized as his friend of the afternoon.

"Drunk or no drunk, he can't call me a liar!" yelled Sheeley, and the next instant Chick, with his heart pounding madly between him and the floor, was in his element. It was a fight! A real one, in

which the hero of Billy-goat Hill held his own against two opponents.

The tumblers and the whisky bottles went first, the liquor dripping from the table to floor; then a chair was overturned, and a window-pane shattered to the ground below.

The thin young man had n't sense to stop; again and again he flung his insults at the infuriated Sheeley, impatiently fighting off the efforts of his companion who sought to part them. Suddenly Chick saw him step back, while the others were grappling, and fumble in his rear pocket. He saw him steady himself against the door jamb, not four feet away, and raise a pistol. There was a sharp report, a smothered groan, then a heavy fall.

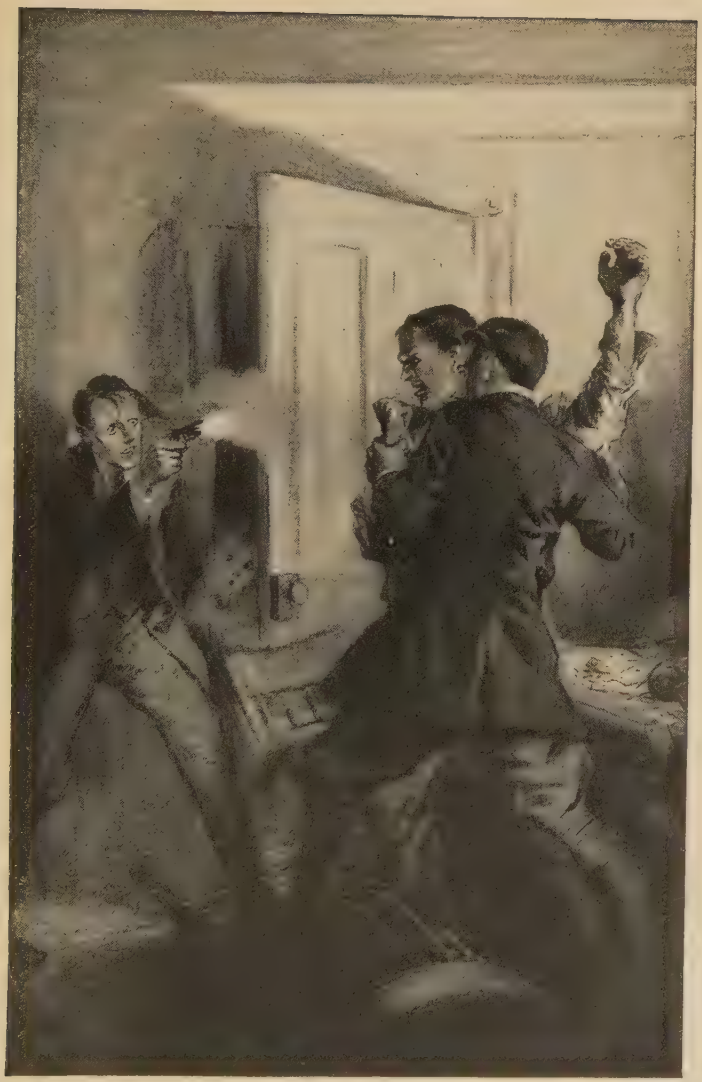
The man with the pistol flung it through the broken window, then staggered to the table where he sank down with his head on his arms.

What had happened in the corner, Chick could not tell, but in a few minutes *his* young man came swiftly into his line of vision, and shook the limp figure half lying on the table.

"Get up, Dill! For God's sake! Are you too drunk to crank up your machine? As soon as I can get that blood stopped I must go for a doctor."

The dazed eyes of the drunken man looked at him in helpless terror!

"I can't stay here!"



There was a sharp report, a smothered groan, then a heavy fall.

"You 've got to stay here! Can't you see you are in no fix to run a machine? Brace up, you idiot; we 've got to *do* something and do it quick. Go down and try to crank up. Here 's the door key! I 'll be there as soon as I can get the blood stopped!"

The man at the table staggered to the door, passed through the hall, so close to Chick that he almost trod upon him, then went swaying down the stairs, steadying himself by wall and banister. Chick heard the side door slam, and the chug of the machine, then realized that it was turning the corner.

The young man in the room rushed frantically to the window and leaned out, then he said something savage under his breath, and plunged out into the passage and headlong down the steps. Chick heard the side door bang again, and a moment later the gallop of a horse.

Then everything was still, but the noisy beating of his heart that threatened to burst its confines. Through the crack he saw the table with its broken tumblers, and the whisky drip, dripping on the floor; he saw the chairs overturned, and the gas-jet flickering in the wind from the broken window.

The thing he could not see was what lay in the corner, the huddled-up, blood-stained hulk of a something for which a smiling, fat woman and six tow-headed youngsters were waiting across the common.

Chick crawled to the head of the stairs, and as he reached the top step his hand touched a hard object. He picked it up and held it to the light, and as he did so, the joy that often blossoms on the brink of tragedy was his for a moment. It was the riding whip whose handle he had fallen heir to that afternoon!

Down the steps, through the door and out into the rain-soaked night he sped; across the common, through the switch-yard, and down the narrow, noisome darkness of Bean Alley. Over a ramshackled fence, and up a dilapidated porch he clambered like a cat, until he reached the small loft in the Flathers' two-roomed mansion which he called home.

Here the hardened criminal, the breaker of laws, and of slot machines, the would-be burglar, threw himself upon an old mattress, and with two grimy fists in his eyes sobbed out his heart to the rafters above.

It was not repentance for his sins, neither was it terror of the secret that was locked behind his inarticulate lips, although both of them had a part. It was because a beautiful young lady had taken his part, and put her arms about him, and refused to believe that he was as bad as Skeeter Sheeley said he was.

CHAPTER V

DURING the rest of the week the rainstorm, that had started all the trouble, continued to hover ominously, breaking forth day after day in fierce, petulant showers. Out at Thornwood the aspect was most dreary; the low-lying ground in front of the house was under water for a quarter of a mile, trees, limp and draggled, stood disconsolate in an unfamiliar lake, the bridge below the dam was washed away, and horses going to the creek for water were constantly being caught by the current, and having to be rescued by ropes. In the flower garden dirty-faced little blossoms lay in the mud, vines trailed across the paths, all the fragrance and color seemed to be soaked out of everything by those continuous, pelting showers.

Within the house it was not much gayer. The front hall, with its steep, narrow stairway, and floor-covering of highly ornate landscape oilcloth, was in a perpetual twilight. An occasional glint from white woodwork, or the gold molding of a picture, strove in vain to dispel the gloom. The parlor, at the right of the hall, was sepulchral with its window

cracks stuffed with paper, and the shutters securely closed. To be sure, the living-room on the other side of the hall did its best to look cheerful, but even that comfortable spot with its low ceiling and battered mahogany furniture, its high cupboards flanking the wide, stone fireplace, and its friendly litter of every-day necessities, was not equal to the occasion.

One afternoon when the Colonel came in from the chicken yard where he and Uncle Jimpson had constituted themselves a salvage corps, he surprised Miss Lady sitting in the dusk on the floor before the empty fireplace, with suspicious traces of tears upon her face.

"Make a light," blustered the Colonel; "you must n't sit around in the dark like this, you know. Where 's my pipe?"

She sprang up and found the missing article, and with a great show of cheerfulness lit the lamp and held the match out for him to light his pipe.

"What 's the matter?" asked the Colonel; "sort of trembly, ain't you?"

"Me? Watch me!" She held the match very straight and very tight, then as it wavered, blew it out and dropped it down his sleeve. "There 's some mail over there on the table for you, Daddy dear. Noah brought it down from town in his buggy."

She said it very carelessly, and even enumerated the contents as she handed it to him:

"Two circulars, a letter from the seed man, the *Confederate Veteran* and the newspapers."

"Nothing for you?"

"Nothing."

Under his scrutiny Miss Lady's eyes fell, and she turned abruptly to the window, while the Colonel, mouth open, pipe in hand, watched her.

He had never seen his girl like this in her life! What business had her lip to tremble in the middle of a sentence, or her eyes to brim with sudden tears, making her turn her back on her adoring Dad, and busy herself with the window curtain?

Of course it is upsetting to have a friend, whom you have been seeing daily for a couple of weeks, get into trouble such as young Donald Morley had fallen into. It made even the Colonel feel bad, he did n't deny it. But what business had the kitten to be taking it all so to heart? Why was she called upon to champion this young stranger's cause so hotly, to resent every insinuation, and to contend passionately that he would be able to explain everything? Morley had not explained. Three days had dragged past and nothing had been heard from him. Nothing probably would be heard from him! The Colonel wanted to feel victorious, but he did not. Instead, he cast anxious and sympathetic

glances at the back of his daughter's head, and surreptitiously wiped his small snub nose on the corner of his red-bordered handkerchief.

He had a good mind to give up his trip to Virginia! To be sure, he had looked forward for months to celebrating Founders' Day at the old college. If it were n't for seeing all the old boys, he would stay at home. By George! the little girl came first; he would stay at home anyhow!

"Those gloves," he burst out by way of breaking the news; "the thin ones I told you to mend. Well, you need n't mend them."

"I have n't," said Miss Lady, "but I 'll do it now."

"Need n't mind. Won't need 'em. Fact is, I ain't going."

"Yes you are," said Miss Lady, adding inconsequently, "Why not?"

"Needed here at home. Roads washed out, everything out of fix. Decided to stay at home."

Miss Lady wheeled from the window where she had been tracing the raindrops on the pane, and made a rush for him, establishing herself on his lap, as far as one could establish oneself on such a perpendicular surface.

"You are not going to do anything of the kind. Uncle Jimpson is going to drive you in to town to catch the first train in the morning."

"I ain't going," insisted the Colonel, shaking his head doggedly.

"Yes you are. Where 's your traveling bag?"

"On the top shelf of the cupboard. But I 'm not going." He said it firmly, but the next instant he asked, "Did Jimpson press my gray suit?"

"Oh! Squire Daddy, I 'm so sorry I forgot to tell him! I 'll tell him now."

"Too late!" the Colonel sighed in resignation; "no use talking any more about it."

"Yes there is! Your enthusiasm 's just gotten damp like everything else. I am going to tell Uncle Jimpson to make a little fire to cheer us up, then we 'll all go to work to get you ready."

It seemed to be a relief to her to bustle about and set things in motion. In a short while she had a cheerful blaze going on the hearth, and the curtains drawn against the dreary twilight without.

The Colonel sat in the middle of the room, watching Uncle Jimpson and Aunt Caroline collect his scattered wardrobe, keeping a vigilant eye meanwhile upon Miss Lady. He simply did not intend to have her unhappy! It was preposterous! Altogether out of the question! His little girl crying around in corners where he could n't see her? The idea of such a thing! If she must cry, what was the matter with his shoulder?

"You ain't got but four hankchiefs in de wash,

Cunnel," announced Aunt Caroline from her knees beside a large wicker basket. "Don't look lak dat 's enough fer a white gem-man to start off on a trip wif."

"Jimpson," the Colonel looked up reproachfully, "did you hear that? You have actually let me get down to four handkerchiefs."

"And socks," continued Caroline, enjoying the opportunity of emphasizing the shortcomings of her lesser half, "'bout sebenteen, all singles. No two scarcely de same color."

"Miss Lady, she been 'cumulatin' 'em to darn 'em," explained Jimpson, glad to shift responsibility. "She 'low she gwine to tak a day off some o' dese days, an' mend up ever'thing in de house."

The Colonel glanced around: "Where is Miss Lady?"

"Out in de hall, readin' de evenin' paper. Nebber did see dat chile tek so much notice ob de newspaper. Yas, sir, I 'll call her."

"Any later news of the shooting?" asked the Colonel casually, when she returned.

"Yes, Mr. Dillingham was indicted and arraigned before the court. The case was passed until June first."

"And Sheeley? What of his condition?"

"The paper says he will lose his eye, but that he will probably get well."

"And — and nothing has been heard of Morley?"

"Not yet."

After supper, when all the preparations for the trip were completed, and the cheerful presence of Uncle Jimpson and Aunt Caroline removed, the Colonel and Miss Lady sat before the dying fire, and tried to make conversation. Outside wet branches swept the windows, and sudden gusts of rain beat against the panes.

"Thirty years since I saw some of the old boys," the Colonel said, trying to warm up to his coming journey. "I 'll miss old Professor Queerington, but John Jay will be there. We are planning to come home together. Fine man, he is, fine man!"

"Who? Oh, yes, Doctor Queerington."

"Just a little boy when I boarded at his father's. He can't be much over forty now. The smartest man the old college ever turned out! And just as good as he 's smart. A little too much book learning maybe, and not any too much common sense, but there ain't many heads built to carry both. He 's sound though, sound to the core, and that 's saying a good deal these days. What 's the matter? Sleepy?"

"No, just the fidgets. Say, Daddy, what do you suppose they will do with Mr. Dillingham, if he is convicted?"

"Penitentiary offense, I hear. But Noah says they 'll get him off. Old General Dillingham has plenty of money, and friends at court. He 'll take care of his grandson."

"But if he is cleared," began Miss Lady, "that throws the guilt on —"

"Now see here," interrupted the Colonel, "you stop bothering your little head about that trial. Go over there and play me a couple of good old tunes, and then we 'll both trot to bed."

Miss Lady's soft untrained voice began bravely enough. She described with feeling the charms of Annie Laurie, and was half way through Robin Adair before she faltered, started anew, stumbled again, then came to an ignominious halt.

"Tut! tut!" said the Colonel fussily, getting himself out of his chair in an incredibly short time for so stout a gentleman. "This won't do, you know; this ain't right!"

"It 's that silly old piece!" said Miss Lady petulantly. "It always works on my feelings."

"But it wouldn't make you cry like this. Come, tell me."

"There 's nothing to tell — that is —"

"Well, never mind then. Just cry it out. That 's right. Don't mind me. Just your old Dad." And with much fussing and petting and foolish assurances that he was her Daddy, he got her over to the sofa.

Sitting on the floor with her arms across his knees, she wept with the abandonment of a child, while his short, stubby fingers tenderly stroked her shining hair. At last when the storm had subsided and she was able to look up, he took her face between his hands.

"Out with it, kitten!" he demanded. "What 's troubling you? Don Morley business?"

She kissed his nearest hand.

"Thought so. You — you got to like him pretty well, eh?"

She nodded between her sobs.

"Better 'n most anybody?" he asked it jealously, but unflinchingly.

"Except you, Daddy." It was a faint whisper, but it was reassuring.

"And what about him?" the Colonel continued.

Another burst of tears, then a resolute effort at self-control.

"He meant to do what 's right. I know he did! He promised to give up drinking and gambling and go to work."

"He made a good start!" The Colonel knocked the ashes from his pipe. "And after he got into the fracas, what in thunder did he run away for? Why didn't he stay and face it out? Any fool would know that if Dillingham is cleared, the suspicion would all be on him."

"But, Daddy, we have n't heard his side yet. If I could just hear from him, or see him."

"See him!" he exploded. "What in the name of the devil do you want to see him for? No siree! Not while Bob Carsey 's got any buckshot left in his gun! Do you think there 's any chance of his prowling 'round here while I 'm gone? That settles it! I 'll not budge an inch. Tell Jimpson! Tell Caroline! Unpack my things."

"But, Daddy, wait! He is probably out at the coast by this time. Besides, he has n't written or sent any word. How do we know that . . . that he wants to come back?"

"He 'll try it all right. I saw how things were going. I saw how he looked at you. The impudent young hound!"

"Daddy! Please don't! You don't know him. He will explain everything when he writes, I know he will!"

"But he won't write! He won't have the face to. The idea of his going straight off from my girl, and getting mixed up in a scrape like this! You 've got to promise me never to speak to the young scoundrel again!"

"But if he explains?"

"Why has n't he done so? Because he can't. Besides, I don't want him to. We are through with

him from now on. Promise me never to have anything more to do with him."

She hesitated, and the Colonel began to fling the things out of his bag in great agitation.

"Please, Squire Daddy!" She caught his hands, and looked at him, and something in her pleading eyes and quivering lips was so reminiscent of another face he had loved, that he broke down completely and had to have recourse to one of his four clean handkerchiefs that were still in the bag.

He was an old fool, he declared between violent blowings of his nose, and clearings of his throat. Was only doing what he thought was his duty. Did n't mean to make her unhappy. Did n't have sense enough to bring up a girl. Had tried to, though! Always would try. Only she must n't be unhappy; he could n't stand that. It would kill him if she dared to be unhappy!

And Miss Lady with her arms about his neck, making futile dabs at his streaming eyes with her little wet knot of a handkerchief, passionately declared that she would promise him anything under the sun, that she was going to be happy, that she *was* happy!

"Not yet," said the Colonel, with much mopping of his brow; "but you will be! We 'll straighten it out. Soon as I get back, I 'll take the matter

up. Sift it clean to the bottom. We 'll give Morley every chance to square himself. But 'til then, you won't see him if you can help it, or read his letters, if he writes? You don't mind promising me that much, do you?"

"I promise, Daddy."

Oh! the promises made for a day, and kept through the years, what a lot of tangled lives they have to answer for!

Miss Lady put the Colonel's things back in his bag, and stooped to kiss him good night.

"Sure you don't mind my going?" he asked, studying her face. "I 'll be back Saturday night."

"All right. Good-by, I won't be up in the morning when you start. Have a good time, Daddy dear, and — and don't worry about me."

He lit her candle for her and carried it to the steps where he kissed her again.

"My little girl," he whispered.

The house grew still. Out on the landing the tall clock ticked off the hours to midnight; the fire died to an ember; from the porch without came the drip, drip, drip of the gutter. Still the Colonel sat in his split-bottom chair, his little eyes like watch fires in the gloom, listening for the faintest sound of restlessness from the room above.

CHAPTER VI

THE sudden light of publicity that had fallen upon the Cant-Pass-It saloon sent a glow over that entire region of Billy-goat Hill. Everybody had something to talk about, and everybody talked, except Chick.

Phineas Flathers appointed himself headquarters for information, and devoted himself exclusively to arguing about the matter. Myrtella, his twin sister, who for fifteen years had presided over innumerable cooking ranges throughout the city, almost lost her new place through her interest in the affair.

The one subject upon which Myrtella Flathers considered herself a connoisseur was murder. In sundry third floors back, she had for years followed the current casualties with burning interest. Realism, romance, intrigue, adventure, she found them all, in these grim recitals of daily crime.

Myrtella and Phineas Flathers had been cast into the sea of life at an early age to sink or swim as they saw fit. Myrtella had survived by combating

the waves, while Phineas adopted the less arduous expedient of floating.

To him work appeared a wholly artificial and abnormal action, self-imposed and unnecessary. The stage of life presented so many opportunities for him to exercise his histrionic ability, that the idea of settling down to a routine of labor seemed a waste of talent. With far-reaching discernment he had early perceived that a straight part was not for him.

In casting about for a field that promised the widest opportunity for his talent, he discovered the Immanuel Church in the city. Here philanthropy burned with such zealous enthusiasm that the harvest was not sufficient for the laborers. Phineas saw his chance and grasped it. He became a Prodigal Son.

From that time on his sole vocation was attending church. Three times a week, regardless of the inclemency of the weather, he unwound his long legs from the chair rungs in the Cant-Pass-It, carefully smoothed his red hair, and made his way to a front pew in the Immanuel Church. At intervals, calculated to a nicety, he fell from grace, and was reclaimed, passing from periods of grave backsliding into periods of great religious fervor. Meanwhile he followed the Scriptures literally and

took no thought of the morrow. His reliance in Providence and the Ladies' Aid became, in time, absolute.

Nor did Phineas Flathers' self-respect suffer in the least by this mode of living. In no sense did he consider himself an incumbent. Did he not three times a week give a masterly presentation of "our needy poor," "our brother-in-misfortune"? Did he not freely offer up his family for each new church society to cut its wisdom teeth upon? Had Maria, his wife, not labored wearily through unintelligible tracts, and Chick, his adopted son, done penance in Sunday School, as often as three Sundays in succession? Considering all things, Phineas felt that the church got a great deal for its money.

Myrtella Flathers, following another method, had for fifteen years fought every obstacle that crossed her path. She had left in her wake traditions of unexcelled cooking, and unparalleled cleanliness, together with a vanquished army of mistresses, housemaids, laundresses, and butlers. She belonged to the order of Cooks Militant, and she had long since won her spurs.

Among the things which Myrtella in her sweeping condemnation of life in general disapproved, none loomed larger than her brother and his family. But the bond of blood, stronger than likes or dis-

likes, favor or prejudice, brought her back to him again and again, to share with him her substance, and to criticize his conduct.

On this particular afternoon she had started out for Billy-goat Hill to hear about the shooting, and to break the news to the family, that she had gotten a new place. This happened with such regularity, that it would not have deserved attention, had not the astounding fact to be added that Myrtella was pleased. In her fifteen years of rebellious services she had never before approximated a place that gave satisfaction. To be sure there were dark and not-to-be-remembered instances where she had failed to give satisfaction herself, but usually it was the place, "the new place," with its varying code of musts and must-nots, that caused Myrtella to spend many of her days in the Intelligence Office, or on street-cars, or tramping through the streets in quest of that ever elusive "good home."

She had started out on her pilgrimage in a fairly equable frame of mind, but before she got well under way, the wind had made her furious. It was a frisky March breeze that had gotten left behind and now wandered into May, bent on mischief.

Myrtella tacked into it, like a sailing sloop, full rigged and all sails set, an angular, heavy-set person with a belligerent expression strangely at vari-

ance with the embarrassed, almost timid movements of her hands and feet. Short locks of straight black hair whipped across her face, her skirts, blown tightly back against her knees, bellied in the wind, while her wide-brimmed hat caught the full force of the blast, like a veritable top-sail.

By the time she had taken three tacks to cross the common, and was ready to come about at the corner, there was a balloon jibe, that sent the sails all flapping against the mast, and left her in such a flurry of indignation, that she failed to see a string that stretched its insidious length, two inches above the pavement, from fence to curb.

After her fall, instead of expiring of apoplexy, as might have been expected from her countenance, Myrtella picked herself up from the pavement and, peeping through a crack in the fence, smiled. It was an expression so unfamiliar to her features that they scarcely knew how to manage it.

"I see you, Chick!" she said in a voice that strove to be gentle; "why don't you come on out here and speak to me?"

Chick and Skeeter, recognized a significant bulge to the string bag which she carried, scrambled forth, the former skilfully evading her outstretched arm of welcome.

"He says," interposed the ever-ready Skeeter, as

his companion made queer noises in his throat, "that he never knowed it was you. He never went to trip you up. Honest to goodness! You ain't mad, are you?"

"No, I ain't mad." Myrtella still smiled as she brushed the dust from her skirt. "Here 's a orange I brought you, Chick. You ain't been sick, have you?"

"Naw! He ain't been sick, but he took that bath you ast him to, and where 's his nickel at?"

Myrtella stood and watched the boys until the corner grocery swallowed them and their new nickel, then she sighed and turned into Bean Alley.

There were no streets here, and an occasional rock or tin can were the only islands in a sea of mud. The Flathers' cottage, consisting of two rooms and a half attic, rested its weight against the cottage next it, with something of the blind reliance that Phineas Flathers rested upon the Church. On its other side it commanded an uninterrupted view of the Dump Heap, which was the background for all the juvenile social life of that section of Billy-goat Hill.

Here ships were launched in mud puddles, flower gardens attempted in tin cans, and fierce wars waged between rival gangs; here embryo mothers played with stick and rag dolls, and aspirants for the circus performed acrobatic feats on the one bit of fence

that had not tumbled down. And all this activity went on almost under the wheels of the dump carts that passed to and fro all day.

Myrtella, picking her way through the mud, was just turning the corner of the Flathers' house when her eyes fell upon a broken window-pane stuffed with a woolen skirt which she had given to Maria to make over into trousers for Chick. She promptly jerked it out with a force that brought the glass with it, and by the time she reached the back door, her jaw was set and her brows knit.

Considering the fact that the rear room was a composite kitchen, laundry, dining-room, pantry, coal house and cellar, the glances with which Myrtella swept the chamber and its one occupant, might have been a trifle less severe. It was a glance in which her individual abhorrence of dirt combined with her racial disapproval of "in-laws."

In the one space in the room that was not preempted, Maria Flathers bent above a wash tub, feebly persuading black garments to become gray. That was all she asked of them. She was not ambitious. Ambition, like everything else, had been soaked out of her long ago by those hot, steaming suds that enveloped her the greater part of her waking hours, and left her physically, mentally, and morally limp. Her one strong instinct was motherhood; but five little Flathers, opening feeble eyes

on their future environment, had become so discouraged that they promptly closed them again. It was as if they really could not stand the prospect of life in that home with Mr. and Mrs. Flathers for parents!

Only Chick survived, the ash-barrel baby, who really was not theirs at all, but who having begun life in their back yard, continued as everything else continued when once established at the Flathers', for the simple reason that no one ever took the trouble to change the existing disorder of things.

As Myrtella sailed wrathfully into port and docked at the door-step, Maria looked up with a gasp:

"Law! Myrtella, you gimme a turn. I forgot this here was your afternoon off. I thought sure you was Sheeley's rent man."

"Sheeley's?" repeated Myrtella, her curiosity getting the better of her temper, as she removed an old shoe and a flour sifter from the nearest chair and sat down.

"Yes, he 's our landlord, but he gits another man to collect. Guess you heard about his gittin' shot?"

"Read every word that 's been printed. Is he goin' to die?"

"Not him. Ain't nothin' the matter with him 'ceptin' his eye is blowed out. My uncle, back home, got both his eyes — You, Chick!" this to an invisible presence that manifested itself only through

a shower of pebbles that followed in the wake of a fleeing cat. "Go up to the saloon, Chick, and tell yer Pappy he 'll have to come on home. Yer Aunt 'Tella's here."

"Don't look like he grows a inch a year," said Myrtella thoughtfully, watching him depart.

"That there Mrs. Ivy 's been after me agin to send him to the Widows and Orphans' Home. She says she can git him in, and they 'll learn him to read and write."

"Well, he ain't goin'! I guess as long as I 'm a payin' the grocery bills, I got a right to say who 'll eat the food! What 's that you are hidin'?"

Maria, who had been attempting to remove something surreptitiously from the table, looked apologetic.

"It 's one of them plaster casts, I 'll be bound," Myrtella continued. "I might 'a' knowed you 'd git the mate to the other one, and not a square inch of space in the house to set it on! What did you give fer it?"

Mrs. Flathers withdrew her apron, and tenderly dusted the highly colored features of an Indian squaw, whose head-feathers reposed upon her arm. Then she placed it on a corner of the stove where its imposing dignity produced a momentary impression upon even the flinty Myrtella.

"How much?" she demanded heartlessly.

"A quarter down, and ten cents a week." Maria sighed. "'Twould n't be no trouble at all if it was n't for Phineas spending so much car-fare going to church and that bow-legged, onery rent-man, that comes sneakin' round here every week, acting like poor people just kep' money settin' 'round in jars waitin' fer the likes of him!"

Maria's hatred of the rent man was the one emotion that seemed to be left in her withered bosom. To baffle him, to evade him, to anticipate his coming and be away from home, constituted the chief object of her existence.

A bang of the gate announced the arrival of the head of the household, which was promptly followed by the strains of a hymn cheerfully whistled in ragtime.

Phineas Flathers, after months of abstinence, had reached that period where he felt that not only his constitution, but his profession would profit by a temporary fall from grace. Solicitude for his moral welfare was beginning to flag at the Church; his regular attendance, his apparent absorption in the sermon, and his emotional execution of the hymns, all went to lift him from the class of interesting converts, to the deadly commonplace of regular members. Only that afternoon he had decided to revive interest in his case at any cost. He had just treated others, as he would have others treat him

at the Cant-Pass-It, when he was summoned home to see his sister.

He now presented himself in his own doorway, a hand on either side of the jamb, and bowed profoundly:

"Miss Flathers! Pleased to meet you! I see you still continue to favor yourself in looks. Lost your place, I suppose?"

"That 's right, be insultin'!" Myrtella flared up haughtily; "throw it in my face that I 'm hard to please, and ain't willin' to put up with any old place I come to."

"Now I would n't put it that I was throwing it in yer face exactly," began Phineas, anxious to propitiate.

"Which means I 'm a story-teller?" Myrtella squared herself for action.

"Oh, come on along," coaxed Phineas; "no harm 's meant. Go on an' tell us what you left fer."

"Who said I 'd left? Puttin' words in my mouth I never thought of utterin'! I ain't left, and what 's more I ain't going to. I got a good place."

Phineas whistled an aggravatingly attenuated note of surprise: "The lady you are working for must be a deef-mute."

"She is. The same as you 'll be some day. She 's been dead three years."

The triumph with which she made this announce-

ment put a momentary quietus on Phineas, and enabled her to proceed:

"It 's a widower gentleman with three children that I 'm cookin' for, and I ain't set eyes on one of 'em except at meal times since I hired to 'em. Queerington 's their names, out on College Street, right around the corner from the Immanuel Church. He 's a teacher or something, one of them book-wormy men, whose head never pays no attention to what the rest of him is doing. 'Take charge,' said he, 'of everything, do the ordering, and cooking, and don't bother me with nothing.'"

"But does he bother you?" put in Phineas astutely; "that 's the real point."

"Was n't I just tellin' you that he did n't? He 's been off on a trip to Virginia; gets home to-night. I 've got the whole house in the pa'm of my hand, from cellar to attic. Miss Connie, she 's the oldest, as flighty as a pidgeon and head so full of boys she don't pay no attention to another livin' thing. Then there 's Miss Hattie, the second one, jes' at that spiteful thirteen age, but so busy peckin' on her sister, she ain't no time left for me —"

"Thought you said there was three children," put in Maria mildly.

"I did. You did n't think I lied, did you? Always ready to snatch up a person's words before they git 'em out of their mouth! The third one

is a boy, Bertie they call him, sick and spin'ly, but a right nice little fellow. Where 'd Chick go?"

"He 's settin' out there on the door-step. Did you hear 'bout our shootin'?"

"Maria was tryin' to tell me, but she did n't seem to have nothin' clear to tell. Who do you think done it?"

Phineas Flathers, balancing himself on the hind legs of his chair, with his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, was nothing loath to launch forth into a full recital of the affair, embellishing it with many a flourish as he went along. In the bosom of his family he was freed from those bonds of restraint that embarrassed his utterance when in more formal society. The amount of profanity that he could dispose of in the course of an ordinary conversation was little short of astounding. This being more than an ordinary conversation and his mood being mellow, called for an extra vocabulary. He graphically set forth the facts in the case, then gave his imagination full sway in accounting for them. He interpreted the whole affair as a clash between capital and labor, a conflict between the pampered aristocrat and the common man. The shooting was the result of a deep-laid plan: Dillingham and Morley had met by appointment, moved by what motive he did not make clear, to kill Sheeley, an honest laboring man. Had n't the one on horse-

back, that they say was Mr. Morley, stopped him at the crossing, on the very afternoon of the shooting, and engaged him in conversation? Phineas assured his listeners that he trembled even now when he thought of the danger he had been in!

"I 'd seed him afore that day a ridin' with a pretty young lady, that most got her neck broke under a engine, but this time he was by hisself, a settin' there on his horse, as proud as a king and stirrin' me up about the rich folks not allowing us poor working classes to have no streets out here. I suspicioned somethin' right then; says I to myself, 'he 's got a handsome face but his mind is a well of corruption.' And when I heard he 'd shot Sheeley . . . Now what in thunder is the matter with you, Chick?"

During this recital Chick had been sitting in the doorway, his knees drawn up to his chin, listening intently, but at this point he cried out in a sputter of protesting sounds.

"It 's the shootin', it 's done got on his mind," explained Maria, winding her long thin hair into a yet tighter knot at the back of her head. "He takes on like that every time he hears us talkin' 'bout it, and nobody can't make out a word he 's sayin'. Fer two or three days I could n't scarcely git him to eat nothin'."

"If your cooking ain't any better than it used to

be I ain't surprised," Myrtella said. "How bad was Sheeley shot, Phineas?"

"Oh, he 'll be laid up fer a month yit. They say the retinue of his eye was cracked right across the middle. But that ain't worryin' Sheeley. He 's livin' in style at the hospital, all his bills paid, and the swells lookin' after him. I hear he ain't even goin' to prosecute. They 've fixed him all right; besides he don't want to git that fly young gang down on his place. He 's countin' on startin' up them sparrin' matches ag'in, as soon as the police quit noticin' him. Say, Sis, you don't happen to have a quarter 'bout you, do you?"

The peculiar persuasiveness of Phineas' voice when he threw out these financial suggestions, was very insidious. In some subtle way he made the favor all on the side of the recipient; he gave the donor, as it were, a chance to acquire merit.

But Myrtella wore the armor of experience. "No, I ain't!" she said, taking a firmer grasp on her bag. "I 'm payin' the grocery man now, and buyin' clothes for Chick. What good does it do? I no more than git his hide covered than you go and sell the clothes offen his back. When are you goin' to git a job?"

"Well, you might say I had one now. Leastwise I 'm a followin' Scriptures and bearin' one another's burdens. Jires, the flagman, over to the Junction

has been laid up with rheumatism and he don't want the boss to know it. He sets in his box and hires me to go out and flag the trains like he tells me to."

"How many trains a day?"

"Two ups, three downs and a couple of freights."

"Should think you 'd die of the exertion. How much do you get?"

"Oh, it ain't so much. But I ain't a ambitious man. What 's the use of me a-slavin' and a-hordin' when I ain't got a child to leave it to? If Claude had a lived, or McKinley, I might 'a' had somethin' to work for."

"You mean you 'd 'a' had somethin' to work for you. The Lord certainly done a good job when he changed His mind about letting them babies live."

"They 're having onions next door fer supper," said Maria feebly, by way of diverting an old discussion. "I ain't been able to git 'em off my mind all afternoon."

Chick, who had been sent to the grocery to see what time it was, came back holding up five fingers.

"Gee, I got to be hiking!" said Phineas. "The passenger train from Virginia 's due at five sixteen. It won't git here before a quarter of six, but I 'm always there on the minute. That 's what Jires pays me fer, fer bein' regular and reliable. Jes' let me

get a regular habit and a clock ain't in it with me. Why, if I was to come in late at church, they 'd stop the service!"

"Well, don't you be gittin' a regular habit of comin' 'round to the Queeringtons!" was Myrtella's parting shot as he rose unsteadily. "When I got anything to say to you I 'll come here."

"That 's right!" assented Phineas cordially; "you jes' make yourself at home. My home is your home. Maria 'll tell you that I says to her only last night, I says, 'Maria, you need n't feel so cut up 'bout askin' Myrtella fer the rent this month, because this is her home, too. There ain't a board in it but I 'd share with her, she knows that.' You tell her all I said, Maria, don't you keep back nothin'. Farewell!" and with an affectionate glance and a wave of the hand Phineas departed.

Now if he had followed the straight and narrow path, indicated by the rocks and tin cans, that led to the Junction, instead of the broad highway indicated by the plank walk that led to the Cant-Pass-It, the tragedy that hovered over Billy-goat Hill might have been averted.

But he had left the saloon in the midst of a heated controversy with two Italians, concerning the supremacy of America over all other nations. The fact that his country had never been proud of him in no way deterred him from being very proud of his

country. Until the dispute was properly ended he felt that the honor of the nation was at stake.

His patriotic fervor ran so high that by the time he reached the crossing, the passenger train was already in sight. Jires, helpless and terrified at his post, was distractedly shouting directions from his little sentinel box.

"Flathers! There 's a washout down the road! We 've got to hold up the passenger train. Get out the red flag! Quick man! Be ready to signal the engineer. Three times cross ways! The red flag, you fool! the RED FLAG! Oh, my God!"

For Phineas Flathers, to whom all flags now looked red, white and blue, was standing at the crossing, joyously waving a white flag, while the engineer with his hand on the throttle, released the brakes, and sent his train thundering down the grade to destruction.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile Myrtella, having finished her visit in a grand finale of pyrotechnics, in which she displayed Phineas to his wife in a number of blazing life-like portraits, took her departure. It was not the first time she had faced the alternative of paying the rent, or seeing her only relative turned into the street, nor was it the first time that, after giving innumerable pieces of her mind to Maria, she had followed them up with the rent.

All the way home she discussed the matter audibly with herself, and was still muttering darkly when she reached the Queeringtons'. So absorbed was she in her own wrongs that she did not notice that the front door stood open, and figures were hurrying about in the hall.

As she let herself into the side door, a white-faced young girl, with her hair brushed straight back into a long braid, rushed through the pantry.

"What 's the matter, Miss Hattie?"

The girl steadied herself by the banister. "It 's father!" she said with chattering teeth. "There 's been an awful accident just below the Junction. They can't even bring him home. They are taking him to a place out there, a Colonel Carsey's. Colonel Carsey was killed. He was sitting right by father. Oh! Myrtella, I 'm so afraid father 's going to die!"

Myrtella standing helplessly before the terror-stricken girl, could find no words of sympathy. In fact she appeared even more formidable and bristling than usual.

"Well, he ain't dead yet," she said shortly, "and any how, there ain't no reason why you should n't have supper. Trouble always sets heavy on a empty stomach."

CHAPTER VII

THE fatal accident which Phineas Flathers' misguided patriotism had precipitated, changed the course of many a life, but to none did it bring more far-reaching consequences than to the daughter of old Bob Carsey.

Miss Lady could never clearly recall those first days after her father's death. They seemed to her a confused nightmare of strange doctors and nurses, of a strange man hovering between life and death in the guest-room bed, of strange people coming and going, or sitting in hushed groups on the stiff horse-hair chairs in the hall, waiting for news. Two facts alone remained fixed in the whirling chaos of unrealities; her father was dead, and no letter had come from Donald Morley.

Each day when the mail arrived she roused from her apathy, and with trembling fingers sorted out the letters, going over them again and again, and never finding the one she sought. Gradually beneath the poignant grief for her father, came the dull persistent pain of a first disillusion. The be-

lief and loyalty with which she had started out to defend Donald began to weaken before his silence. In his trouble she had been ready to rush to him, to succor and forgive, but he had not called upon her. Now in her great need, she was calling to him, and he did not come. Suspicion began to crowd on the heels of doubt.

Had he not acknowledged his instability? Had her father not seen it from the first? Was his desire to settle down in the country but one of the whims of which his life seemed made up? Perhaps she herself had only been a passing fancy, something wanted for the moment, but soon forgotten. At the end of a week her pride rushed to arms. Whatever reason he might offer now would come too late.

The sudden plunge from irresponsible girlhood into this mysterious region of grief and doubt, where one must tread the thorny path alone, terrified and bewildered her. She did all the last sad, futile things one can do for the dead; then when all was over, fled from the confusion at Thornwood, and sought the silence of the woods. Here fierce outbursts of rebellious grief were followed by hours of apathy when she tramped for miles, seeing and hearing nothing, but urged on by an insistent desire to be in motion.

It was at the end of one of these tramps that Noah Wicker found her late one evening, on the grass by the river, sobbing out her heart at the spot where the Colonel used to fish.

Noah's words of comfort were as scarce as his other words, so he sat on a log near by and waited silently until she was ready to go home. At the stile, where he left her, he handed her a letter.

"I got it at the station this noon," he said. "Thought I 'd be over earlier, but did n't know if you wanted me."

She did not hear him, the letter had come! Her fingers thrilled at its touch, and the warm blood surged to her heart. Without another thought for Noah, she sped up the walk to the house, where she locked herself into the living-room. Match after match sputtered and went out in her nervous fingers, before the lamp was lighted.

He had written! He cared! He was coming! Over and over she whispered the words to herself. Then she looked at the postmark on the heavy envelope, and her heart sank. San Francisco! After all he was not coming back!

Her eager finger was at the seal, when her eyes fell upon a briar-wood pipe that lay on the table beside a half-filled pouch of tobacco. In an instant she seemed to see a stubby brown hand reaching for it, the quick spurt of the match, the flare of light on

an old weather-beaten face, then a deep-drawn breath of contentment as the Colonel settled back and held out his other hand to his little girl.

And her last promise to him had been to do nothing until Donald's name should be cleared. She could keep her promise now, but could she after she had read Donald's letter? If the mere touch of it in her hand plead for him, what would the living words do?

She looked hopelessly around the cheerful, homely room, every foot of which spoke to her of her father, and of his love for her. On the white door-frame were penciled the proud records he had made of her height on each successive birthday. On the walls were pictures of her he had treasured, from the time she was a round-eyed baby, to the present day. In the cupboard was a green box containing her first shoes, her little dresses, her first letter, her baby curls.

Over the harpsichord was a portrait of the Colonel himself, painted before she was born. It represented a dashing, young sportsman, surrounded by his pack of hounds. Twenty years ago this gallant hunter had given up the chase, with many another joy, to minister to her baby needs, to share her joys and sorrows, and be father, mother, play-fellow all in one.

She clasped Donald Morley's letter tightly and

closed her eyes. Never in her short life had she wanted to do anything so desperately as she wanted to read that letter, and yet the reading of it would mean breaking a promise to one whom she could never promise anything again. Her newly awakened love and her sense of justice pleaded hotly for Donald, but the empty room and her empty heart, and a passionate sense of loyalty to the dead, spoke mutely for her father.

After all, nothing could justify those long days of silence, that failure on Donald's part to come to her in her trouble. Her father's judgment was probably right after all, and it was best she should put an end to the matter once and for all.

Sobbing like a child, she kissed the letter again and again, and kneeling by the fire, held it to the flame, and watched it burn to ashes on the hearth.

After that one dreary week followed another, with the same invasion of strangers, the same varying reports from the sick room. Gradually, however, the reports became more favorable, the tension eased, visitors became less frequent, and Thornwood began to settle down to its normal state.

Owing to the nature of Doctor Queerington's injury, and the severe shock he had sustained, it was not thought best to move him to the city until he was stronger. The quiet country house was an excellent place for convalescence, and under the

She held it to the flame, and watched it burn to ashes on the hearth

direction of his trained nurse he could be allowed to read and write, free from the annoyance that must beset him when once he returned home.

This arrangement was listlessly agreed to by Miss Lady, who had no plans for the future, and dreaded another adjustment. She was singularly alone in the world, and too dazed for the present to know what her next step should be. The only thing of which she was certain, was that she would never leave Thornwood.

On one of the first days that Doctor Queerington was allowed to sit up, she went in to see him. Her first impression in the darkened room was the kindly clasp of a hand, and a wonderful low voice that spoke words of comfort. Then gradually she saw the slender, overserious face of a middle-aged man, with small eyes somewhat too close together, a broad intellectual forehead, and a firm, well-formed mouth that seemed a stranger to smiles.

From that time on she found his room a refuge. He had been the unknown object of her admiration since she was a child, he was her father's friend, the last to be with him before his death, and he talked to her for hours about the great mysteries of life and death. He was the only person to whom she talked who never seemed to be in doubt.

It was not the first time that the Doctor had proven a consoling presence in time of affliction.

Where others conjectured, or evaded, he boldly affirmed. The universe to him was an open book, from which he enjoyed reading aloud.

One morning, six weeks after the accident, Miss Lady came into his room with a handful of flowers and found him propped up in bed, his books about him, and a note in his hand.

"I have a communication from my cousin, Mrs. Sequin," he said with the polite formality that was habitual to him. "It seems that she is going to honor me with a visit."

"Mrs. Sequin?" Miss Lady wheeled so suddenly that she overturned the vase in which she was arranging the flowers. "Now see what I've done! I'll fix it, Miss Wuster; don't bother."

It apparently required little self-control for the trained nurse to refrain from bothering. She was sitting with her heels firmly hooked under the rung of a straight-back chair, crocheting with passionate abandon. Filling hot-water bottles, taking temperatures, feeding patients, were mere interruptions to her real vocation of converting spools of linen thread into yards of linen lace.

"She states her intention of coming to see me," the Doctor continued, "but I cannot decipher her hieroglyphics sufficiently to find out the time. Perhaps you can assist me."

"Is this a D?" asked Miss Lady, looking over his shoulder.

"I judge so; an adaptation of the Greek character. Why the art of handwriting should be considered obsolete, I am at a loss to —"

"Oh, she says she is coming to-day," interrupted Miss Lady, "on the eleven train. I must go down and tell Uncle Jimpson to be at the station, and have Aunt Caroline put on another plate for dinner."

"Then what are you going to do, my dear?"

"I was going to the cemetery."

"You would better come up here instead. In your mental state a person is very sensitive to environment. You should avoid everything that excites the emotions. I think you can trust me to know what is best for you just now?"

"Indeed I can," Miss Lady said impulsively; "you have helped me more than anybody. Daddy would be so grateful if he knew."

"He does know," announced the Doctor with the finality of one to whom all things have been revealed. "But we must not discuss these things now. Miss Wuster has just been reading me the account of young Dillingham's trial. Perhaps you have been following it?"

"Yes," said Miss Lady without looking up.

"It is a matter of especial interest to me," con-

tinued the Doctor; "especial regret I should say. Young Dillingham is engaged to be married to the daughter of my cousin whom I expect to-day, and the other young man involved, Donald Morley, is Mrs. Sequin's brother."

"Well for the life of me," said Miss Wuster, counting stitches between her sentences, "I can't see how they got Mr. Dillingham off, unless it was the way Mr. Gooch said."

"Who is Mr. Gooch?" asked Miss Lady of the Doctor.

"The gentleman who came to see me yesterday. He is a lawyer and has followed the case closely. He does not scruple to affirm that the trial was a farce, one of those legal travesties that sometimes occur when a scion of a rich and influential family happens to transgress the law. It seems that the saloon-keeper, who was at first reasonably sure of what happened, suffered a strange lapse of memory when on the stand. Gooch thinks he was bought up, but Gooch is fallible where human motives are involved. His misanthropy invariably colors his judgment."

"Well, nothing on earth can keep me from thinking that Mr. Dillingham did the shooting!" declared the nurse with violent partizanship. "Look at the way he sneaked home, and left the other young man to get a doctor and help move Sheeley to the hospital.

Yes, sir, it 's time for your medicine, just wait 'till I finish this spool and I'll go down and heat the water."

" He — he ought n't to have gone away? " said Miss Lady, looking at the Doctor interrogatively.

" Donald, you mean? Certainly not, it was most ill-advised, probably some quixotic idea about not wanting to testify against his friend. If you knew the boy you would understand what a hot-headed, harum-scarum person he is. He was my pupil at one time and I grew quite fond of him. He has ability, undoubted ability, but he is a ship without a rudder; he has been drifting ever since he was born."

" This acquittal of Mr. Dillingham puts the blame on — on him, does n't it? "

" Naturally. His absence at the trial was undoubtedly one of the strongest arguments in Dillingham's favor. Mr. Gooch tells me that the counsel for the defense took especial pains to throw suspicion upon Donald. The case has been confusing in the extreme, the absence of witnesses, the failure to establish the ownership of the pistol, the absurd complication about the slot machine and crowbar, — an absolute jumble of contradictory evidence. As for Donald Morley's being guilty, it 's absurd! He is not the sort of man who runs away from punishment."

Miss Lady's heart swelled with gratitude. Of course Donald Morley was nothing to her now. She had assured herself of that so continuously for two months that she was beginning to believe it. She knew that he was wild, reckless and unreliable, that he had failed her in her greatest need, and that she had put him out of her life forever. But it was good of the Doctor to take his part!

"I know now what my father meant when he said you were the justest man he ever knew!" she said timidly, lifting a pair of shining eyes.

"Unfortunately for Donald the Court does not share my opinion. It is not known even by the family as yet, but Mr. Gooch tells me that Donald has been indicted by the grand jury."

"Indicted!"

"Yes, he can never return to Kentucky without standing his trial. It is a serious affair for him, I fear."

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN in the course of the morning Uncle Jimpson started to the station to meet Mrs. Sequin, he did not have to direct the course of his steed. Had old John not known the way from experience, the inherited memory of his ancestors would have prompted him to turn twice to the right, once to the left, and pull up at a certain corner of the station platform. For the honor of being the Carseys' "station horse" had descended to him from his father Luke, whose father Mark had in the days of prosperity traveled in harness with Matthew, fulfilling that same important office. Thus John was, in a way, enjoying the distinction of apostolic succession.

Arrived at the station Uncle Jimpson stepped jauntily around the post-office box and ostentatiously took out the Carseys' mail. It was a small act to take pride in, but in lieu of more important duties it had to serve. For the past six weeks the advent of city people at Thornwood had stirred up old ambitions in him. A new sprightliness was observable in his gait, a briskness in his speech, which Aunt

Caroline did not hesitate to characterize as "taking on airs."

The blood of a butler coursed through Uncle Jimpson's veins, a stately, ebony butler who had been wont to stand at the Thornwood door during the old days and hold a silver tray covered with boutonnières, for the arriving guests. Uncle Jimpson had inherited this tray along with an ambition that was not above buttons. Year after year he had descended with the descending Carsey fortunes, passing from the house to the horses, then to the field, and finally becoming the man of all work, but never relinquishing that dream of his youth, to stand in livery in the halls of the rich, and exercise those talents with which Providence had blessed him.

As he passed the compliments of the day with two farm hands, who were loading a wagon near by, his eye fell upon a strange object that stood in the door of the dining-room. It looked to Uncle Jimpson like pictures he had seen of lions, only it was small and white and barked remarkably like a dog.

"Dat sure am a curious lookin' animal," he observed. "Hit must b'long to a show."

One of the farm hands laughed and pointed with his thumb to the waiting-room. Uncle Jimpson tiptoed to the window and peered in. All that he

could see was the back of a very imposing lady and the top of a large plumed hat.

"Is — is she a-waitin' fer anybody?" he whispered, motioning anxiously with his soft hat.

"Oh! no," said the nearest man; "she ain't waitin'; she 's just enjoyin' the scenery on them railroad posters. She likes to set there, been doin' it for a half hour."

Uncle Jimpson scraped the mud from his shoes, buttoned the one button that was left on his linen coat, and dropping his hat outside the door summoned courage to present himself.

"'Scuse me, mam, but does dis heah happen to be Mrs. Sequm?"

"It is," said the lady, haughtily.

"Yas 'm, dat 's what I 'lowed. Dat 's what I tole Carline — leastwise dat 's what I 'st gwine tell her. Ise Cunnel Carsey's coachman."

Mrs. Sequin eyed him coldly through a silver lorgnette. "Did n't they understand that I was coming on the eleven train?"

"Yes 'm, dat 's right. But you allays has to 'low fer dem narrow gauges. Dey has to run slow to keep from fallin' offen de track. Dat must have been de ten o'clock train you come on."

"Not at all, I left the city at ten minutes of eleven."

"Yas 'm, dat was de ten train den. De leben train don't start 'til long about noon."

"Preposterous!" said Mrs. Sequin, sweeping to her feet. "Take me to the carriage. Fanchonette! Where are you?"

Uncle Jimpson apologetically dragged forward his left foot, upon the trouser hem of which the small dog had fastened her sharp little teeth.

"Frightfully obstinate little beast," said Mrs. Sequin, "she won't let go until she gets ready. You need n't be afraid of her biting you. She could n't be induced to bite a colored person."

Uncle Jimpson, carrying the dog along on his foot, led the way, while Mrs. Sequin, with the cautious tread of a stout person used to the treacheries of oriental rugs on hardwood floors, followed. She was a woman of full figure and imposing presence, whose elaborate coiffure and attention to detail in dress, gave evidence that the world had its claims.

At sight of the shabby, old, mud-covered buggy, and the decrepit apostolic John she paused.

Jimpson all obsequious politeness, put a linen duster over the wheel, and with a gesture worthy of Chesterfield, handed her in.

"I wish the top up," she commanded. "The glare is unspeakable."

Uncle Jimpson, standing by the wheel, shuffled his feet in embarrassment: "Yas 'm," he agreed,

"I 'll put it up effen you want me to. But it won't stay up. No, mam, it won't stay. Looks lak in de las' two or three years it got a way o' fallin' back. Cunnel 'lowed he was gwine to git it fixed onct or twict, but he ain't done it."

Fanchonette just here became enraged at a bit of paper that was caught in the wheel, and gave vent to such a violent burst of temper that it required the undivided attention of her mistress to calm her.

Uncle Jimpson, occupying the smallest possible portion of the seat, and with one leg hanging outside the buggy, rejoiced in the proximity of so much elegance. It gave him a feeling of prosperity and importance, and made him straighten his back, crook his elbow, and even adopt a more formal manner with old John. He deeply regretted that he had not put on a clean coat and as for the buggy, he was already planning a thorough cleaning of it before driving the stylish guest back in the afternoon.

"Stop a moment!" commanded Mrs. Sequin peremptorily. "What a view! I had no idea there was such scenery anywhere around here!"

"Yas 'm, hits about de fines' sceneries in de world! You kin see from dem heights clean down to de bridge. All dis hill used to be our-alls. I 'member hearin' how Mr. Rogers Clark done gib it to

de Cunnel's gran'paw fer a lan' grant when de Injuns libed here!"

"Who owns it now? Who owns the hilltop?"

"I don't know, mam. We been sellin' off considerable."

"Well, I must find out about that at once. I 'll send an agent out to-morrow to look into the matter. Colonel Carsey left only one daughter, I believe, and she never married?"

Uncle Jimpson jerked the reins and looked a bit nettled.

"Not yit," he said, "but she ain't no old maid, Miss Lady ain't. Dere neber wuz a Carsey lady yit dat withered on de stalk; de trouble wif *dem* is dey git picked too soon. Ez fer Miss Lady's ma, she was n't but jes turned sebenteen when me an' de Cunnel went down to Alabama to marry her."

"Who are Miss Carsey's relatives, her advisers?"

"She ain't got none. She did n't hab a livin', breathin' soul but her paw, 'ceptin' me an' Carline, an' Carline's liable to drop off mos' anytime."

"But who is going to live with her?"

"I spec she gwine git married some day," Jimpson said hopefully, "all de boys been plumb 'stracted 'bout dat chile since she wuz a little girl. But she wuz so crazy 'bout her paw, she jes laff at 'em. Now de Cunnel 's gone, she 'll hab to git somebody else to make ober."

"Well, I must find out about that hill," said Mrs. Sequin, turning for a last glimpse. "Whose old place is this we are coming to?"

"Dis is our place, dis is Thornwood," said Uncle Jimpson, half in pride, half in apology, as he skirted the holes in the road. "It don't look lak itself. It 's a terrible pretty place when it 's fixed up."

"Dreadfully run down," said Mrs. Sequin to herself, making a sweeping survey of the premises, "all this front lawn ought to be terraced and have granitoid walks and formal approaches. The house could be made quite imposing."

They had turned in the long winding avenue, and were following the old gray wall that swept in a wide circle past the negro cabins, then toward the house.

Suddenly Mrs. Sequin pointed dramatically to the little porch of one of the cabins.

"A Sheraton! Great heavens! Where did it come from? What is it doing there?"

Uncle Jimpson, following the direction of her finger, looked surprised: "Dat ain't no sheraton, dat 's a sideboard. Leastwise it wuz one 'fore I fixed it into a chicken coop. I took out de drawers and put on dem cross-pieces. Got forty de purtiest little chickens you eber seen!"

"And the legs are curved and have knobs, have n't they?"

"No, mam, dey ain't no more bow-legged dan most chickens. Do you raise chickens on your place?"

"No, but we may when we get to the country. By the way, you don't happen to know of a good colored man around here, do you? One who understands horses, and would look well in livery?"

Uncle Jimpson's eyes set in their sockets. Old John and the rattling buggy faded from his consciousness. In their place he saw himself on the box seat of a grand Victoria, in a double-breasted coat and high hat, lightly shaking the reins across the backs of two sleek thoroughbreds. It was even more alluring than his cherished dream of butlerhood! Already he felt his swelling chest strain against the gold buttons!

But what about Miss Lady? Who was going to stay at Thornwood and take care of her? Domestic infelicities had rendered him callous to Aunt Caroline's claims, but Miss Lady, his "little Missis"?

"No, mam," he said dejectedly as he assisted Mrs. Sequin to alight. "I can't say ez I do, not jes' at present. Sometime I might heah ob a good man, say 'bout my size an' build. You, Mike!"

Mike had rushed at the small poodle with the apparent intention of swallowing her at a mouthful, but at Uncle Jimpson's stern reproof he snapped at

a fly instead, and tried to give the impression that that was what he was after all along.

"Ain't you 'shamed ob yourself?" Uncle Jimpson muttered. "Fussin' 'round here an' stickin' out yer lip at white folks? Come on 'round back where you b'longs. You an' me is corn-field niggers, dat 's all we is!"

And with that irritable dejection that often follows self-sacrifice, Uncle Jimpson limped away with the subdued Mike skulking at his heels.

CHAPTER IX

AS Mrs. Basil Sequin swept up the broad steps at Thornwood, she congratulated herself upon a duty about to be accomplished. She had not foregone a bridge luncheon to make this tiresome trip to the country for purely altruistic reasons. She had come to prove to herself, and to her circle, the bond of friendship that existed between her and her distinguished cousin. Experience had taught her that an occasional reference to "my favorite cousin, John Jay Queerington, the author, you know," had its influence. "His is the only great intellect," she was fond of telling her husband, "to which I am related either by blood or marriage."

Doctor Queerington's reputation was one of those local assumptions that might be described as prenatal rather than posthumous. It was what he was going to be, that made his name an awe-inspiring word in the community, more than what he was already. It was the conviction of his friends and colleagues that a tardy world would too late recognize his genius.

After waiting impatiently for some one to respond

to her vigorous use of the heavy knocker, Mrs. Sequin tucked Fanchonette under her arm and pushed open the door. The hall had doors to right and left, but before making further investigations she paused to examine minutely the tall mahogany clock, and the quaint silver candlesticks that stood on an old table at the foot of the steps.

While bending to inspect the latter, she heard a door open, and looking up saw a pretty, slender girl in a short white petticoat and a sleeveless black dress lining, which displayed a pair of remarkably shapely arms.

"Oh, I did n't know you had come!" exclaimed the young person, cordially extending a smiling welcome. "What a darling little dog! Is he a poodle?"

"She is a French poodle," said Mrs. Sequin with a manner intended to impress this exceedingly casual person. "Where shall I find my cousin, Doctor Queerington?"

"The front room up-stairs, on that side. I 'd go up with you, only Miss Ferney Foster, our neighbor, is fitting this lining and she has to get back to her pickles. I wish we were born feathered like birds, don't you?"

Mrs. Sequin, who had a masculine susceptibility to a pretty face, could not repress a smile.

"I know this lining looks queer," went on the girl

with an answering twinkle. "But it does n't look any queerer than it feels. Miss Ferney does n't know what 's the matter, and neither do I. Would you mind taking a peep at it up there between the shoulders? I 'll hold the doggie."

To her surprise, Mrs. Sequin found herself removing her gloves, and adjusting a badly cut lining across a smooth white neck, while the girl before her, having shifted all responsibility, fell to making love to the poodle which she cuddled in her arms.

"It 's too tight here," said Mrs. Sequin, pinning and adjusting, "and too loose there. Have her take up the side seams to the place I have marked, and lengthen the shoulder seams at least an inch."

"Thank you so much. It feels heavenly now. You go right up-stairs! You can take your things off in my room, if you like, just across the hall from the Doctor's." And without further ceremony the young hostess went tripping down the hall, leaving Mrs. Sequin to ascend the stairs alone.

Ascending was one of Mrs. Sequin's chief accomplishments. Twenty-five years' experience on the social ladder had made her exceedingly sure-footed. Her reward now was in sitting on the top rung and dictating arbitrarily to all those below. She had acquired a passion for dictating, for arranging, and setting in order. The crooked seams which she had just pinned straight gave her a satis-

faction that almost counteracted her annoyance at the informality of her reception.

Once established at the Doctor's bedside, with the nurse detailed to exercise Fanchonette in the yard below, she gave herself up to the pleasure of recounting at length her troubles of the past few months. She enjoyed talking, as a prima donna enjoys singing: she loved to hear the cadences of her own voice, and to watch the gestures of her jeweled hands.

"It 's an unspeakable relief," she assured the Doctor, "to actually see with my own eyes that you are n't a mangled cripple from the terrible wreck! You can't imagine how frightfully anxious I 've been, but then this whole spring has been a veritable nightmare. Donald and Lee Dillingham both involved in this unspeakable scrape, Margery on the verge of nervous prostration, you perhaps fatally injured, and Basil Sequin too engrossed in his own affairs to give mine a moment's consideration."

"Basil has grave responsibilities as president of the People's Bank, Katherine," said the Doctor, keeping his fingers between the leaves of the massive volume which he had regretfully closed at her entrance. "I, for one, owe him a debt of gratitude for relieving me of all financial anxiety. Besides you are always thoroughly capable of taking the reins in a family crisis."

"Yes, but it 's telling on me. I notice it in bridge.

I am not the player I was a year ago. This trial of Lee Dillingham's has been a hideous strain. Of course, if he had been convicted, I should have compelled Margery to break her engagement, and that would have complicated things frightfully. You know his grandfather, the old general, is the largest stockholder in the People's Bank, and Basil insists that he must not be offended. That was one reason why I was so anxious to keep Don out of the way. Even if Lee was guilty, Don could n't appear against him when he was engaged to Margery. The only possible course was to hush up the entire affair with as little publicity as possible. Thank heaven, General Dillingham has gotten Lee off, and I am beginning to breathe again."

"And you have heard nothing from Donald?"

"No, indeed, and I hope I won't for the present. I wrote immediately after the shooting to every place I could possibly think of his going, and implored him, if he had a grain of gratitude for me, or affection for Margery, that he would keep away, and not even let his whereabouts be known until this wretched affair had blown over. I can nearly always appeal to Don on the score of gratitude. I must say for him that, like the rest of the Morley men, he sows his wild oats like a gentleman. You remember Uncle Curtis? They said at the club he was a frightful drinker, and yet not a woman of

his family ever saw him intoxicated. Then look at Grandfather Morley!"

Mrs. Sequin was mounted on a favorite hobby. She had a large and varied collection of family skeletons, some of rare antiquity, which she delighted in exhibiting. She could recount the details of the unfortunate matrimonial alliances on both sides of the family for generations back, and was even more infallible in the matter of birth dates than the family Bible. If a relative by any chance got a trifle confused, and acknowledged to thirty-nine next June instead of last June, Mrs. Sequin pounced upon the error like a cat on a mouse. She could prove to him immediately that he was born the spring that Uncle Lem Miller died, and that was the same year that Grandmother Weller married the second time, therefore he *was* thirty-nine *last* June.

"Donald ought to return at once," declared Doctor Queerington, when she paused for breath; "if he is guilty, he ought to take his punishment; if innocent, as I believe, he ought to be vindicated."

"Well, we can't find him," said Mrs. Sequin with resigned cheerfulness. "He is probably in the Orient with Cropsie Decker. What a magnificent bed this is! Do you suppose I could buy it? Country people nearly always prefer new furniture."

The suggestion of a smile hovered over the Doc-

tor's thin lips: "Thornwood's possessions, I imagine, are not for sale."

"I suppose the extraordinary young person I met in the front hall was Miss Carsey? What sort of a girl is she, anyhow?"

"Miss Lady?" The Doctor shifted his pillow. "An extremely nice girl, I believe. Exceedingly sympathetic and attentive to all my wants, and receptive to a remarkable degree. She has been reading to me daily, and I find rather an unusual mind, undisciplined of course, but original and interesting."

"But what amazing manners the child has! She greeted me in her bare arms, and asked me to fit a dress for her when she had never seen me before in her life. But she certainly is pretty! I haven't seen as pretty a creature for years."

"Indeed!" said the Doctor, adjusting his eyeglasses. "I had not observed it, especially. A fine, frank countenance, with dark eyes — yes, I believe I did notice that she had chestnut eyes of unusual clearness; I remember I did notice that."

"What is she going to do? Who is going to stay with her?" asked Mrs. Sequin. "Fancy a girl like that buried here in the country! Properly dressed, and toned down a bit, she'd make a sensation. I shouldn't at all mind asking her in to spend a few days with me sometime. You know I adore young people, and poor Margery, like all the

other last year débutantes, is simply done for. Has n't a spark of enthusiasm for anything. I hope you have not forgotten the fact that your Constance ought to come out this winter?"

"My dear Katherine," said the Doctor with an air of enforced patience, "you do not seem to realize that my time and mind are engrossed in far greater things than society. I hope in the next year to complete the fifth and last volume of my 'History of the Norman Influence on English Literature and Language.' If I have been able to give my children very little of my time and attention, it is only because of my desire to leave them something of far greater worth — a name that I trust will stand among those of the foremost English scholars of my day."

Mrs. Sequin soothed her irritation by studying her highly polished nails. "Of course, that will be an advantage to them. But what on earth 's to become of them in the meanwhile? Heaven knows what Hattie will develop into if she is n't taken in hand. She refuses to have trimming on her underclothes now, and wears boy's shoes. As for Constance! I 've quite despaired of getting hold of her. She 's simply running wild, making no social connections whatever. What they really need, Cousin John, is a mother."

"I must try to look after them more," the Doc-

tor said, somewhat helplessly. "Have you seen them recently?"

"I came by there this morning. They were all well, I suppose; Connie was at the Ivy's as usual, and Hattie at school. What a savage creature your new cook, Myrtella, is. I believe she is an anarchist! She opened the door only a crack, and when I asked her how the young ladies were, she said she was sure she did n't know, that she had n't asked them."

"And Bertie, did you see Bertie?"

"Yes, he was with her. Had a dirty piece of dough in his hands which he said was going to be a cake. I must say she seems good to Bertie, but I would not tolerate her impertinence for a moment."

"Myrtella carries concealed virtues," said the Doctor. "She is an excellent cook, and a good manager. Her only faults, apparently, are faults of the disposition."

"From which Heaven defend me! What on earth is that noise? It sounds as if some one were kicking the door."

"Please open!" called a voice from without, and as Mrs. Sequin complied, Miss Lady came in, carrying a large luncheon tray gaily decorated with flowers from the garden.

"'Blest be those feasts with simple plenty crowned,'" quoted the Doctor. "You see how they spoil me, Katherine?"

"I don't believe he could be spoiled, do you, Mrs. Sequin?" Miss Lady asked, as she fixed his eggs. "Is there anything else, Doctor?"

"Don't run away," Mrs. Sequin said, following her movements with frank admiration. "Come here and sit down, I want to talk to you. I've discovered the ideal site for my new house, and I want to ask you about it. You know the western crest of this hill overlooking the river; did that belong to your father?"

"It all used to be ours, long before it was ever called Billy-goat Hill."

"The name *is* a handicap," said the Doctor. "You might modify it, Katherine, by calling your prospective mansion 'Angora Heights.'"

"The very thing," said Mrs. Sequin, eager to seize upon any suggestion that emanated from the Queerington intellect. "But who does the ground belong to?"

"It belongs to Mr. Wicker, now."

"Wicker?" repeated Mrs. Sequin. "Where have I heard that name? Why, Cousin John, was n't that the man Don stayed with, when he was looking for a farm? How we laughed over that absurd notion of his farming!"

"I did not laugh at it," said the Doctor. "I encouraged him. It seemed to me the most excellent idea!"

"But you did not allow for Don's fickleness. Of course he 's a darling fellow but he has had as many hobbies as he has had sweethearts."

"I allowed for his character, which may yet strike root in the proper soil," the Doctor said with dignity; then turning to Miss Lady, who had risen and was standing by the bed, her hands tightly clasped and her eyes fixed on his, he explained: "We are speaking of the young brother of Mrs. Sequin; I was telling you about him this morning. Why, child!" For Miss Lady had suddenly dropped her face in her hands and made a rush for the door.

"It 's the shock of her father's death," explained Mrs. Sequin, who prided herself on divining motives. "I was like that for weeks when my last dog was run over. The most casual thing would upset me. I lost two games of cards one afternoon because somebody merely mentioned an icewagon."

The Doctor's long, slender fingers drummed absently on the bedspread. Presently he broke in quite irrelevantly on Mrs. Sequin's steady flow of talk: "I said chestnut brown, Katherine, they are more of a hazel, I should say, a deep hazel with considerable fire."

CHAPTER X

THE long, summer months dragged their length for Miss Lady, months of heartache and rebellion, of loneliness and tears. Then came a day when, without apparent reason, the shadows lifted. She was tramping across the river flats, with Mike at her heels, when once again she heard the world singing, and before she knew it an answering song sprang to her lips.

Uncle Jimpson, plowing near by, looked up and smiled:

"Dat 's right, Honey; sounds lak ole times to hear you singin' ag'in. I was jus' settin' here steddyin' how good I 'd feel ef de Cunnel could come a stompin' 'long an' gimme one of his 'fore-de-war cussin's fer bein' lazy."

"Oh, Uncle Jimpson, if he could! It seems so long since he left us. I have just been over to Miss Ferney's, but she was n't there. I want to get her to come and stay with me until I know what I am going to do. They expect to take the Doctor home to-morrow."

"Yas 'm, Carline was tellin' me. Looks to me lak

he 's been well enough to go fer some time." Uncle Jimpson scratched his head wisely.

"I don't know what 's to become of us," said Miss Lady ruefully twisting Mike's ears. "They say unless I sell the rest of Thornwood, we won't have money enough to live on. But I won't sell another acre. I 'll teach school first."

Uncle Jimpson was scandalized: "Now, Miss Lady, chile, don't you git dem notions in your head. Dem 's ole maid notions, you ain't no ole maid yit! Why don't you git married, and git a kerridge, an' I 'll dribe an' Carline 'll cook an' tak' care de chillun."

"I 'm *never* going to marry, Uncle Jimpson," Miss Lady declared, with the passionate assurance of youth. "And I am never going to leave Thornwood. If you see Miss Ferney going down the road, ask her to stop by a minute. Come on, Mike, we are late now."

And they were late, five minutes, by the open-faced watch that lay in the Doctor's hand as they entered the garden. He was sitting in his wheel-chair with his books and manuscripts on a table at his elbow, and he lifted an expectant face toward the gate as she entered.

It was strange what two months at Thornwood had done for the Doctor. He had been brought there unconscious, a serious, middle-aged professor, who

had run in the same groove for twenty years. The same surroundings, the same people, the same monotonous, daily routine had rendered him as rusty and faded as the text-books he lived with. Nothing short of a collision could have jolted him out of his rut, and the collision had arrived.

The sudden change from the grim realism of a lecture platform, with its bleak blackboard and creaking chalk, to the romance of an old flower garden where blossoms flirted with each other across the borders, and birds made love in every bough, was enough to freshen the spirit of even a John Jay Queerington. His cosmic conscience, which usually worked overtime, striving to solve problems which Nature had given up, seemed to be asleep. His fine, serious face relaxed somewhat from its austerity, and as the days passed he read less and observed more.

His observations, before long, resulted in a discovery; he, who was so weary of the cultivated hothouse species of femininity, had chanced quite by accident upon a rare, unclassified wild-flower, that piqued his curiosity and enlisted his interest. For two months he had depended almost entirely upon his young hostess for companionship, and the fact that the large box of books he had ordered from the city remained unopened, gave evidence that the Doctor had not been bored.

During the hours when he was not engrossed in verifying statistics, and appending references to those voluminous and still accumulating notes for the fifth volume of his great work, he devoted himself to sorting and arranging the odds and ends of facts and fancies that he found stored away in Miss Lady's brain. Under ordinary circumstances he would have dismissed a pupil to whom clearness and accuracy were strangers, and whose attention wandered with every passing butterfly. In the classroom he not only demanded but practised order and system. He arrived at his conclusions by as methodical a series of mental actions as he arrived at his desk every morning at twenty-nine minutes to nine. But these were not ordinary circumstances.

The impetuous young person who listened to him with such rapt admiration and respect, when she listened at all, had no method or system whatever. She simply waited for the hint, the flash that revealed the vision, then she joyously and fearlessly leaped to her conclusion.

The fact that amazed him was not that she frequently landed before he did, but that she landed at all!

As for Miss Lady herself, she was finding the Doctor's interest and companionship a welcome solace in her loneliness. The well of his knowledge seemed to her fathomless, and she never tired of

hanging over the brink and looking down, often seeing stars in the darkness that she never saw in the day.

When this last lesson was finished, the Doctor closed the book reluctantly:

"I have given you the merest outline for future work," he said. "The rest remains with you. Have you decided yet what you are going to do?"

"No, I 'll do whatever you tell me, Doctor. Only I do hope it won't be to teach school,— the very thought of teaching makes me shrivel."

"It is not altogether beyond the range of possibility that you will marry," said the Doctor, tracing parallelograms on the arm of the chair. "Such things do happen, you know."

Miss Lady, sitting with her elbows on the table and her chin on her palms, flashed a strange, questioning glance at him.

"Do you believe in love, Doctor?"

"Why, of course, you foolish girl, in all its manifestations, filial, paternal, marital. Assuredly I do."

"But I mean that other kind, the kind that makes a little heaven for a man and woman here on earth, that answers all their longings, so that nothing else matters, just so they have each other. I read about it in novels and in poetry, but I don't see it. The married people I know take each other as much for

granted as they do their hands and feet. That's not what love means to me."

The Doctor smiled indulgently. "Wait until you have passed the sentimental age before you give your verdict! Most young ladies imagine that because love does not arrive, full panoplied on a snow-white steed, that it is not love. You, probably, like the rest, have read too many romantic novels. When you come to know life better you will realize that moral equality and intellectual affinity promise a much safer union than a violent romantic attachment."

She regarded him as earnestly as if he had been the fount of all wisdom.

"How long does it usually last?" she asked.

"Last?" he repeated.

"The sentimental age. I suppose a girl ought to get through it by the time she is twenty. But I never do things on time. I did n't even know I was sentimental until you told me. I have learned a great many things since you came."

"There were some things you did not need to learn," said the Doctor quietly. "Kindness and sympathy, and rare understanding. I shall always look back with pleasure to these quiet weeks spent under your father's roof. They have given me the only chance I have had in years for undisturbed writing on the History that will stand for my life

work. I must confess that I dread my return home. The noise and confusion, the constant invasion of my privacy, the demands upon my time, appal me. Very few realize the magnitude of my work, and the necessity it lays upon me for isolating myself. You have been singularly sympathetic and helpful in that respect."

"But think what your being here has meant to me! You came into my life just when everything else seemed to drop out. You explained things to me, and gave me something to do. You can't begin to know how you have helped me."

"I have only tried to direct and suggest," the Doctor said; "in short to take the place —"

"Of a father," finished Miss Lady enthusiastically.

The Doctor tapped his foot impatiently. After all her father was a much older man than he: the distance, at that moment, between forty and sixty seemed infinitely greater than that between forty and twenty.

"You see," Miss Lady went on, unconsciously, "you have taken Daddy's place in so many ways that I have been depending on you for everything. It makes me awfully lonesome when I think of your leaving. Down here you have just belonged to Miss Wuster and me, and once you get back to town you will be the famous Doctor Queerington

again and belong to everybody. I shan't dare write to you for fear I spell a word wrong."

"Indeed, I shall expect a weekly letter reporting the progress of your studies, and I shall come to see you from time to time and help you with your plans for the future."

"Yes, but it won't be the same. We will sit in the parlor, and you 'll be company, and I shall be afraid of you. I am always afraid of you the minute I get out of your sight."

"What nonsense! I never criticize anything but your pronunciation, and an occasional exaggeration of statement. If I have seemed severe —"

"You have n't! You 've been an angel! When I think of all the time you have taken from your writing to help me, I am ashamed for letting you do it."

"You must not think," said the Doctor slowly, "that I have been wholly disinterested. I have found you singularly helpful to me. I think I may say that you stimulate me and refresh me more than any one I know."

"*I* do? Oh! Doctor! That 's about the nicest thing I ever had said to me."

He was not prepared for the radiant face of gratitude that was lifted to his, nor for the proximity of her glowing eyes which gave him no further reason for doubting their exact hue.

"Yes," he said with slight embarrassment, "your mind interests me exceedingly. It is not complex, nor subtle, but remarkably intuitive. You have imagination and humor, and great receptivity."

Miss Lady wore the absorbed look people usually wear when their characteristics are undergoing vivisection; she could not have been more fascinated had she been viewing her face for the first time in a mirror.

"This little volume now," the Doctor continued, picking up an elementary treatise on evolution; "I am particularly anxious to see what effect it will have on a fresh, unsophisticated mind. Make notes as you read, and we will discuss it when you have finished."

"And you won't forget to send me the copy of Mrs. Browning?"

"No, I seldom forget. But I may not send it. Science is better for you just now than poetry. What is that blossom you are so carefully cherishing?"

Miss Lady's eyes fell, and the color leapt to her face.

"This? Just a wild rose I found over there by the wall. I thought they had stopped blooming weeks ago."

The Doctor took it in his hand and examined it minutely: "It is the *Rosa Blanda,*" he said, "five

cleft sepals that terminate in a tube. Pliny tells us that in ancient days the warriors used the petals of this rose to garnish their choicest meats. Who is that quaint person coming over the stile?"

"It's Miss Ferney. What a nuisance, on our last day! But I forgot, I asked her to come. If she stays very long, just tell a little fib, won't you, and say you need me for something?"

"It will not be a fib," said the Doctor quietly, "I do need you."

Miss Lady met her caller at the front porch and relieved her of the jar she was carrying.

"It 's pickles," said Miss Ferney, a withered little woman whose small, nibbling face suggested a squirrel's. "I thought having company you might need 'em. Don't know though. City people may be too aristocratic to eat country pickles."

"The idea, Miss Ferney! Don't you sell them in the city all the time?"

"Yes, under labels. City people lay stress on labels. When I was a child, I was n't allowed to eat things that was labeled. I hear he 's going?"

"Who?"

"Your Doctor. Don't see how you 've ever stood him so long."

"Oh! you don't know Doctor Queerington! It 's been a great privilege to have him here. He is a

very distinguished man, Miss Ferney, and so kind and good!"

"Good or bad, they are all the same to me. Just as soon have a fly under my mosquito bar as a man buzzing around in my house. When 's he going?"

"To-morrow. Will that be too soon for you to come over?"

"No, I 'm ready to come. Sis Lizzie will be sure to try some of those new-fangled receipts and spoil a bushel or two of cucumbers, but I said I 'd come and I will. What is this Jimpson is telling me about your taking the examinations for the county school?"

Miss Lady sighed: "I may have to teach; I don't know."

"Sell off some more land. You don't need a hundred acres."

"We 've sold too much already! It will be the house next. I am determined to hold on to Thornwood if the roof tumbles in on my head!"

"I know how you feel," said Miss Ferney whose sentiments ran to real estate. "I 've been saving every nickel I made for nearly twenty years to buy back our place. From all the talk we heard last spring, Sis Lizzie rather allowed you was going to get married."

"Well, I am not."

"I am glad of it. Folks are keen enough to believe in every beau a girl has 'til she 's thirty. After that they don't believe in any of them. Sis was misled by what they told her over at the Wickers'."

"What did they tell her?" asked Miss Lady, training a rebellious moon vine up the trellis.

"Oh, they told her about that young city fellow you was rampaging all over the country with last spring. Mrs. Wicker said he had n't a thought in his head but you. That he wore her plumb out telling her about you, just as if she had n't help raise you on a bottle!"

Miss Lady still found the vine absorbing, but she took time to say over her shoulder:

"Tell your sister and Mrs. Wicker that that young man has gone to China."

"Well, nobody could wish him further! I hope he will stay. You are too nice a girl to get married. What do women want to marry for anyway? Look at me! Forty years single and not one minute of it spent in wishing I was married! I glory in my independence, I glory in my freedom."

Miss Ferney was allowed to glory undisturbed, for Miss Lady, leaning against the railing of the porch, had apparently forgotten her existence.

"You just make up your mind to take that school job, and lead a useful, independent life. I know a teacher in Shelby County that 's had the same

school for fifteen years, ever since she was a plump, pretty girl, and she 's thin as I am now, and gray as a rat. Kept that same position and done well all these years."

Miss Lady wheeled suddenly and flung out her arms:

"If you don't hush this minute, Miss Ferney, I 'll run off and join the circus! I 'd lots rather stand on one toe in fluffy, spangled skirts, and jump through a hoop than teach school!"

Miss Ferney looked scandalized: "You don't seem right well," she said as if in excuse for such flippancy. "I do believe you 've got a fever. I 'm going straight home and mix you up a tonic."

Miss Lady sat for some time on the steps with her eyes on the distant river. Up the hillside the treetops rippled in the breeze, and down in the valley the winding stream danced in the shallows or loitered in brown pools to whisper secrets to the low-hanging boughs. The world seemed to her not only very beautiful, but very lonesome, and the vow of eternal celibacy, made to Uncle Jimpson, loomed large and terrible in the presence of Miss Ferney.

"Oh, here you are," said the nurse, coming around the house; "the Doctor has been refusing to lie down until you come out to the garden. He says he needs you for something. Deliver me from convalescents!"

Miss Lady laughed and ran down the path to the garden, where the Doctor greeted her with his rarest smile. The rest of the morning they pored over manuscripts, sorting notes, and making corrections, she happy in having even a tiny share in his great work, and he finding her enthusiasm and interest a welcome condiment to stir his jaded appetite for his task. Meanwhile, a bedraggled little rose languished unnoticed beneath the manuscript of "The History of Norman Influence on English Language and Literature."

CHAPTER XI

FOR three hundred and sixty-five days Myrtella Flathers held undisputed sway in the house of Queerington. The Doctor's semi-invalidism, after his return from Thornwood, threw all responsibility upon her, and while she permitted him to wear the crown, it was she who wielded the scepter. Never had the house been in such immaculate order, nor the young Queeringtons appeared in such presentable garments, and never had the front door been slammed so persistently in the face of unwelcome guests.

For the Queerington family tree was afflicted with too many branches. There were little dry twigs of maidenly cousins, knotted and dwarfed stumps of half-gone uncles and aunts, vigorous, demanding shoots of nephews and nieces, all of whom had hitherto imposed upon the Doctor's slender income, and his too generous hospitality.

Myrtella objected to the inroads these invaders made on his time and strength, and she also objected to the extra work their presence entailed upon her. In short, she felt that the family tree needed prun-

ing, and she set herself right heartily to the job. By persistent discourtesy she managed to lop off one relative after another, until she gained for the Doctor a privacy hitherto undreamed of.

"There ain't a hour in the day that I ain't headin' off somebody!" she triumphantly announced one day to the cook from next door. "When I come here you'd 'a' thought it was a railroad station, people comin' and goin' with satchels; and bells a-ringin', and trunks being dragged over the carpets. Dirt from the top of the house to the bottom; Miss Hattie with her petticoats hanging down below her dress; and all the neighbor children racing in and out, and actually takin' the mattress off Bertie's bed to coast down the stairs on!"

"In the name of St. Patrick!" sympathized Norah, the visitor; "and their pa not doin' nothin' with 'em at all?"

"Who said he was n't?" blazed Myrtella instantly. "You 'll be hintin' around next that I was talkin' about the Doctor behind his back. You 're fixin' to lose me my place, that 's what you are doin'."

"Not me! It 's braggin' on you I was not over a week ago, sayin' what a fine, nice cook you was, and how grand and clean it was over here."

"Of course," said Myrtella haughtily, "I may not be workin' fer a lady that 's so smart she

would n't even know her own kitchen if she met it walkin' up the street. I may not work in a house where they pull down the shades and burn red lamps in the day time to keep from showin' the dirt under the sofa. We don't keep two servants and not have enough to feed 'em, but *I 'm* satisfied. At least fer the present. The day will come when I won't have to be in service to no one. I 'm puttin' by each week, and the time ain't distant when I 'll be settin' at the head of my own boardin'-house table, an' it will be 'Miss Flathers,' if you please! You, Bertie!" this to a frail-looking little boy in the back yard. "You git up off the grass this minute! Fixin' to catch the croup and have me up with you all night, like I was last week."

"Sure 'n I might find a worse place than Mrs. Ivy's," continued Norah. "A bit of blarney, and frish flowers every day in front of her photygraph, and things right for Mr. Gerald, is all she wants. The last place I worked,— Mrs. Sequin's, bad luck to her! . . . It was a party or a dinner between me and me rest ivery night of the week! Sorra a bit did I care for the whole kit of 'em, barring Mr. Don Morley, as fine a young gentleman as ever set foot in sole leather!"

"Him that shot Dick Sheeley and run away?"

"Him they laid it on," said Norah with indignant emphasis. "It was that good-for-nothin' Mr.

Lee Dillingham done it, and Mrs. Sequin a-movin' heaven to marry Miss Margery off to him. I seen how they was tryin' to keep Mr. Don from comin' home and hearin' the tales they was tellin'. He is worth the whole bunch of 'em tied in a knot; a gentleman inside and out, and his hand in his pocket ivery time you served him. Ain't that somebody a-callin' ye down the back stairs?"

"Let 'em call," said Myrtella, to whom these comparisons of past places were replete with interest. "It 's just Miss Hattie; if she 's got anything worth sayin', she can come down and say it."

It was evidently worth saying, for a moment later, a thin, sharp-featured girl of fourteen thrust her head in at the door.

"Myrtella, I told you I wanted that white dress fixed. I am going to wear it this afternoon."

"It 's too early to wear summer clothes," Myrtella announced, continuing her ironing. "I never sewed the buttons on a purpose, so 's you could n't wear it."

"Well I *will* wear it! I am going right straight up stairs and pin it on."

As the door slammed, Myrtella turned a beaming face on Norah:

"It ain't hemmed!" she said with satisfaction.

Norah shrugged her shoulders:

"It would be a cold day that 'd see anybody makin' me do the cookin' and nursin', and sewin' for a family of four, for five dollars a week!"

Myrtella glared at her across the ironing board:

"Who said anybody was makin' me? I 'm paid to do the cookin' and housework in this house, and if I see fit to light in and boss things 'round a bit, it 's my own business. Thank the Lord, I got manners enough to attend to it! How much coffee did you come over here to borrow?"

"A cupful will do, 'til the morning. I 'll bring it back before breakfast."

"Put it in this jar when you do. I keep what you pay back separate from ours, so 's I can lend it to you again. We ain't used to chicory."

Norah coughed deprecatingly behind her hand:

"Sure you might make allowance fer a lady as busy as Mrs. Ivy. She can't get her mind down to ordn'ary things."

"Stop her settin' on club boards, and meetin' on committees, and tryin' to regulate the nation, and she might remember to order the groceries. What 's she workin' on now?"

"A begger man. It was readin' Scriptures to him she was when I come away, and him a-settin' there, right pitiful, a-tellin' her how he 'd lost all he had in the flood. A religious talkin' man if I ever heard one."

"Red-headed?" inquired Myrtella, arresting a hot iron in mid air.

"He was."

"When she gits done with him, you send him over here," Myrtella brought the iron down on the board with a thud. "If there is one person in the world I 'm layin' for it 's a red-headed flood-sufferer."

Norah on her way out encountered another visitor and turned back to announce him:

"Git on to what Bertie has drawed out here! The craziest, dirtiest kid! Puts me in mind of a egg on a couple of toothpicks!"

Myrtella, peering over her shoulder, suddenly scrambled down the steps.

"It 's Chick!" she cried, beaming upon him. "How long you been here, Chick?"

"And who 's Chick?" asked Norah, instantly curious. "You seem to set a great store by him! What ails the child? What 's he pointin' at our house for? Ain't he got a tongue in his head?"

"He has, though not so long as some folks. Chick! Bertie! Come in here!" and without ceremony Myrtella swept them into the kitchen and slammed the door in Norah's face.

Once within her stronghold, she first embraced Chick, then dragged him forcibly to the sink, and subjected him to a vigorous scrubbing. Both ac-

tions apparently bored him acutely, for he turned his soap-dimmed eyes enviously upon the smaller boy who pranced about in transports of joy.

"We 'll skate on the pavement!" Bertie was crying excitedly. "You can have one skate, and I 'll have the other and we 'll see who can beat."

"You won't do nothin' of the kind!" quoth Fate at the faucet. "I ain't goin' to have you racin' 'round and gettin' het up and takin' cold. Besides, you ain't big enough to keep up with Chick!" Then seeing the disappointment her ultimatum had caused, she added, "if it was n't for you stickin' every thing up, I might make you some candy."

"Oh, 'Tella! will you? 'Lasses candy? Ask him if he likes 'lasses candy."

Violent nods of affirmation from the steam-enveloped victim.

Myrtella had started with the simple ambition to wash Chick's face, but the boundary line had proved troublesome. Whether she sharply defined it, or attempted artistic effects in chiaroscuro the result was equally unsatisfactory. Myrtella was nothing if not thorough; before she finished with Chick, he was standing with his feet in a bucket, as clean and wet and naked as a fish.

All this consumed time, and both boys were growing impatient, when a peculiar noise from outside attracted their attention. To Chick, only, the sound

seemed to be familiar, for he laughed and wagged his head and pointed to the yard.

"It sounds like hiccoughs!" said Bertie, his head on one side.

Myrtella's mouth closed like a trap. "I'll hiccough him!" she breathed mysteriously, and leaving the children to watch the candy, she went out on the porch and closed the door behind her.

Bertie, in his short kilts, with his feet curled up in a chair, watched Chick with absorbed interest as he donned his ragged, dirty trousers. A pair of purple suspenders that had once belonged to Mr. Flathers, excited his special admiration.

"Say, Chick, have you got a partner?"

Chick nodded.

"You could n't be partners with me, too, could you?"

A violent shake of the head.

"I did n't think you could with two fellows at once." Bertie contemplated the boiling candy thoughtfully. "I could get lots of partners if I was n't always sick. If you ever don't have the one you have got, could you take me, Chick?"

Chick looked him over critically, stood him up and measured heights and even felt his arm for muscle. Then he made a remark that while lacking lucidity was nevertheless conclusive.

"But I 'm going to get bigger," urged Bertie.

"And I 've got a music box, and a water pistol, and some marbles —"

At this Chick promptly produced a handful of marbles from his own pocket, and signified, by many whispers and hisses, that he was engaged in a wholesale and retail trade along that line, and open to negotiations.

Bertie made a hurried trip to the nursery and returned with a neat blue bag from which he poured treasures of agate and crystal.

Chick lost all interest in the candy. His professional reputation was at stake. Never could he face the gang on Billy-goat Hill, if he failed to fleece this lamb that Providence had so clearly thrust in his way.

Meanwhile Myrtella was exercising an elder sister's prerogative on the back steps, and bestowing upon her brother what she modestly called a piece of her mind.

For Phineas, in one of his periodical backslidings, had slid too far. His ambition to excel as a regenerate had carried him out of the quiet pastures of the Immanuel flock, into the more exhilarating battle-field of the Salvation Army. Lured by the prospect of recounting his experiences on a street corner to the accompaniment of an accordion, he had forsaken the safe shelter of the Ladies' Aid, and sought new worlds to conquer.

The experiment had not been a success. He was now, at the end of a year, going from door to door, ragged and unkempt, playing the small and uninteresting rôle of flood-sufferer. But Phineas' spirit soared blithely above his circumstances. He even encouraged Myrtella in her tirade against him, spurring her on to fresh effort, as the monks of old courted flagellation.

"That 's right, Sis!" he urged, "you git it all out of your system. I says to the lady next door, I says, what I need is a dressing down from my good sister. She 'll give me gussie, says I, then she 'll light in an' help me. That 's her way, I says, there ain't a more generous person on this terrestrial globe. I 'lowed maybe she 'd be moved to follow your example, but she was n't. She handed me out a line of Sunday school talk fer more 'n a hour, then she did n't give me nothin' but this here Bible, an' me a starvin' man! I 've ate a little of everything in my day, but I 'm skeered to risk my digestion on Deuteronomies and Psa'ms!"

"Well, you need n't come beggin' 'round here, and trackin' in the mud," announced Myrtella firmly. "I 'm done with you! You had just as good a chance to get on as me. I never ast favors of nobody; I went to work an' hustled. What 's more, I ain't goin' to stop 'til I get to be a boardin'-

house keeper. And what 'll you be? A lazy, drunken, good-for-nothin' sponge."

Phineas, toying with his hat, suddenly sniffed the air and smiled.

"Molasses candy!" he exclaimed joyfully. "I could n't git on to what was making me feel so good. Say, Sis, you must 'a' knowed I was a-comin'."

Myrtella stood in rigid disapproval on the top step and surveyed her next of kin with such chilling contempt that he decided to change his tactics.

"Honest, now, Sis, I never come to beg for nothin'. What I really come for was to tell you 'bout our good luck."

This move was so adroit that it caught Myrtella unawares, and elicted a faint show of curiosity.

"We never knowed it 'til last week," Phineas proceeded mysteriously, "an' we ain't mentioned it to nobody 'til we git a parlor fitted up an' a sign painted."

"What for?"

"Fer see-ances! There 's been a Dago doctor, calls himself Professor King, hangin' 'round the Hill, an' the minute he lays eyes on Maria Flathers he seen she was a mejium. He give her four lessons fer a dollar, an' she begin to hear raps an' bells ringin' the fifth settin'. Last night she begin to move the furniture."

"She must 'a' been in a trance!" exclaimed Myrtella. "I been knowin' Maria about fourteen years an' I never heard of her movin' the furniture. She can go to more pains to scrub around a table leg than any one I ever knowed."

But in spite of her scoffing, Myrtella was impressed. For many years she had considered a visit to a spiritualist, or clairvoyant, one of her wildest and most extravagant dissipations. The possibility of having a medium in the family was a luxury not to be lightly dismissed.

"Where 'd you git the money fer the lessons?" she demanded suddenly.

Phineas hesitated and was lost.

"You spent Chick's! He 's as ragged as a scarecrow. Looks like he don't get enough food to push his ribs out. I ketch you spendin' the money I give him on sperrits, livin' or dead, an' I 'll never give you another cent!"

"Now, Sis, hold on! You did n't lemme finish. I 'm thinkin' some of running a undertaker's business, along in conjunction with the see-ances. We could keep tab on the customers then, and build up a good trade. All on earth we need is just a little capital, an' we 'd be a self-supportin' couple inside a week."

So convincing were Phineas' arguments, that in the end Myrtella consented to act as *deus ex*

machina for the new psychical venture, on condition that Chick should be properly clothed, and fed, and made to go to school.

This agreement having been arrived at, Myrtella reached for her broom, and began such a vigorous attack on the steps, that Flathers was forced to conclude that his presence could be cheerfully dispensed with. He gathered himself up, slapped his hat on the side of his head, tucked his Bible under his arm, and made a sweeping bow.

"Fare thee well, my own true love. Bring the money Saturday night, an' Maria 'll wind up the sperrits an' let 'em manifest fer you, free of charge. Sorry I can't wait fer that molasses candy to git done. You might send me some by Chick. Adiew!"

Myrtella stood, broom in hand, and watched the loose-jointed figure slouch down the pavement and out the back gate. He was cheerfully whistling the doxology, and his face wore the rapt expression of one whose thoughts are not on earthly things. She sighed and shook her head.

"Front door bell 's ringing," called Bertie, "so 's the telephone, and Father 's gone out and says you can clean his study. There 's the bell again."

"I expect it 's Mr. Gooch inviting himself to supper. I ain't goin' to let him in. Give me that there plate to pour the candy in."

"Look, 'Tella, what Chick traded me!"

Myrtella cast a side glance at Bertie's extended palm, and promptly rescinded the deal.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Chick Flathers! Tradin' a little fellow's fine marbles fer them comman allies? It 's cheatin', that 's what it is, it 's stealin'! Ain't you ashamed?"

Chick *was* ashamed and had the grace to show it. His contrition would probably not have developed except through exposure, but standing before Myrtella's accusing glance, and the surprised, hurt look in Bertie's eyes, his hardened conscience was pricked, and his lip began to tremble.

With a fierce gesture of protection Myrtella pulled him to her:

"Don't, Chick! Don't cry! I was n't meanin' to scold you. You ain't had a chance like other boys. You never had no playthings, you never had nothin'. You was a poor little abandoned child ever since you was born. Oh! God, I 'm a wicked woman! I ain't fit to live on the earth!"

This amazing outburst so stunned the two small boys, that they stood looking at her in open-eyed astonishment. For some moments she swayed to and fro with her apron over her head, then savagely dried her eyes, and, bidding them follow her, stalked up the back stairs with broom and dust pan.

Doctor Queerington's study was at the top of the house, where by means of closing the doors and windows, and stuffing his ears with cotton, he was able to shut out that material world to which he preferred to remain a stranger. The room was filled from floor to ceiling with books, and it was one of the crosses of Myrtella's life that behind the visible rows of volumes, stood other rows, forming a sort of submerged library beyond the reach of her cloth and duster.

In no room in the house did she feel her importance more fully than in this inner shrine. She had calculated with mathematical precision the exact position of each of the Doctor's desk utensils, she knew the divinity that hedged about a manuscript, and the inviolable nature of bookmarks.

When Bertie began fingering the inkstand, she pounced upon him.

"Don't you dare touch a thing, either one of you! When the Doctor told me to take charge of his things, I took it. There ain't ever been a word of complaint since I come here, and I ain't goin' to have one at this here late date. There 's the Doctor now comin' up the steps; I 'll finish up here later. Get away from there, Chick!"

But Chick had made a discovery. On the Doctor's desk, smiling out from a porcelain frame, he had found his divinity! It was the beautiful young

lady who had once taken his part in a fight with Skeeter Sheeley over a whip handle; it was the young lady who always smiled at him when she rode by Billy-goat Hill; it was she who had changed his life ambition from grand larceny to plumbing! Heedless of warning he snatched at the picture, and as he did so it slipped from his fingers and the frame shattered on the floor.

Doctor Queerington, at the doorway, took in the situation at a glance. He looked quickly from Myrtella's horrified face to the cringing figure of the strange child, then he smiled reassuringly.

"There is no serious harm done," he said in a quiet, pleasant voice; "the frame can be easily replaced, and as for the photograph —" he paused and smiled again, then he drew Bertie's hand into his; "Myrtella, I shall no longer have need of a photograph of that young lady. She has consented to come herself and take charge of us all."

Myrtella stood as one petrified; her massive figure with its upraised duster was silhoueted against the light, like a statue of the goddess of war. At last she found voice:

"To take charge?" she gasped. "Do you mean she 's comin' to be Mis' Squeerington?"

"I do."

"Well, I give notice," announced Myrtella with

all the dignity of offended majesty, and shoving Chick before her, she slammed the door upon the astonished Doctor and stalked haughtily down the stairs.

CHAPTER XII

"A BRIDE who does n't see her duty, should be *made* to see it," declared Mrs. Sequin to Mrs. Ivy in her most impressive manner. "Something is naturally expected of the wife of John Jay Queerington. I told her expressly that Friday was her day, I even telephoned to remind her, and here it is four o'clock, and people beginning to come, and she off playing tennis!"

They were waiting in the twilight of the Queerington parlor, that plain, stiff, old maid of a parlor that had sprung completely furnished from the brain of a decorator some two decades before and never blinked an eyelid since. It was a room with which no one had ever taken liberties. Hattie had once petulantly remarked that her father would as soon have moved a tooth from his lower to his upper jaw, as to have moved an ornament or picture from the parlor to the second floor.

Mrs. Ivy, the lady addressed, smiled tolerantly. It was one of Mrs. Ivy's most irritating characteristics that she was always tolerant of other peo-

ple's annoyances. She was blond and plump, and wore a modified toga and a crystallized smile.

"Ah! Mrs. Sequin," she purred, "our little bride is a child of Nature. Sweetness and light! We must not expect too much of her at first. My Gerald says she 's like a wild little waterfall dancing in the sun, undammed by conventions. Gerald phrases things so perfectly."

"Well, I 've had enough of trying to manage a waterfall!" Mrs. Sequin said grimly. "Cousin John asked me to take her in hand, and I must say I am finding her difficult. Perfectly sweet and good natured, you know, but she goes right on her own way. She has decided that she likes Connie's friends better than the Doctor's, that her hair does n't feel right arranged the way it should be, that she is n't going to wear dresses made by fashionable dressmakers because they are uncomfortable. She actually told me she liked to be a few minutes out of style!"

"But is n't she right?" murmured Mrs. Ivy, "God has given her a graceful, symmetrical body, should n't she clothe it in flowing robes that do not confine or —"

"For Heaven's sake, Mrs. Ivy, don't you dare start her on dress reform! Her one chance for social success is her beauty. She simply terrifies me the way she says right out the first thing that

comes into her mind. It will take me months to teach her the first lesson in society, that the most immodest thing in the world is the naked truth."

"What I hope to rouse in the dear girl," said Mrs. Ivy with a superior smile, "is a sense of responsibility toward her fellowmen. I have already proposed her name for the Anti-Tobacco League and Miss Snell, our corresponding secretary of the Foreign Missionary Society, has promised to meet me here at five. It is these young, ardent souls that must take up the banner of reform when it drops from the hands of us veterans."

"Well," said Mrs. Sequin, turning a handsome, bored profile to her companion, "I shall never get over the absurdity of the marriage!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Ivy, laying a plump white hand on Mrs. Sequin's arm, "cosmic forces brought them together! The thing we seek is seeking us. She was young, inexperienced, adrift in the world; he was ill, lonely, and with three motherless children. She told me that through the past year, the Doctor's letters were all that sustained her."

"Of course they did! Cousin John's letters sustain everybody. Especially if you have n't heard his lectures. Of course he *does* repeat himself."

"As for her youth," went on Mrs. Ivy. "What if she is a mere rosebud as yet? She 'll unfold; we 'll help her to unfold, you and I, won't we?"

Meanwhile the bride had slipped in the side entrance and was making frantic haste in the room above to exchange a tennis costume for a new house-dress.

Connie Queerington was assisting, but Connie's assistance was generally a hindrance. She was an exceedingly voluble, blond young person, with blue eyes that enjoyed nothing more than their own reflection.

"I 'll never get it hooked if you don't hold still," she was saying. "Every time you laugh you pop it open."

"Fifteen — love, thirty — love, forty — love, game!" rehearsed Miss Lady, practising a newly acquired serve with a vigorous stroke of her racket. "I could play all day and all night! Do you think I 'll ever get to be a good player?"

"Of course, if you just won't get so excited and hit the balls before they bounce. Gerald Ivy says your overhand play is great. He 's mad about you, anyhow. I 'd give both my little fingers to have him look at me as he did at you to-day."

"Silly!" laughed Miss Lady. "There goes the button off my slipper. Do you suppose any one will notice if I pin the strap?"

"Nobody but Myrtella. Sit on your foot if she comes around. If you don't hurry Cousin Katherine will have nervous prostration."

"I don't see why you have to treat reception day like judgment day," complained Miss Lady. "Who else is down stairs?"

"Only Mrs. Ivy now. She is the one who held your hand and called you a sunbeam. Gerald's mother, you know. Hat can't abide her; says she 's a pussy-cat. Of course Mr. Gooch will be here for supper."

"Who?"

"Mr. Gooch."

"A friend of the Doctor's?"

"No, indeed. He is n't anybody's friend. He bores us all to extinction."

"Well, what 's he coming for?"

"I don't know. He always comes on Friday. He came in here once to get out of the rain, and Mother asked him to stay to tea. That was ten years ago and he has been back nearly every Friday since."

"Do you have company like this all the time?" asked Miss Lady somewhat breathlessly.

"This is nothing!" exclaimed Connie dramatically. "Before Myrtella came I never knew what it was to sleep in my own bed, and I had to eat the legs of chickens until I felt like a centipede. There! You are all right; come along. Don't forget to tell Father about the party!"

Miss Lady had been married two weeks, but she

was still circling wildly in a vortex of new experiences that excited and bewildered her. Through a long, lonely winter she had fought out her problems at the little country school, relying implicitly upon Doctor Queerington's friendship and guidance. His weekly letters, couched in paragraphs of technical perfection, seemed to her oracles of wisdom and beauty. Then the amazing and unbelievable thing had happened! He, the great Doctor Queerington, her father's friend, her friend, the man whom she respected more than any one else in the world, had chosen her, a young, inexperienced girl to be his wife!

To one who was quite sure that she was through with illusions for ever, and who flattered herself that the sentimental age was safely behind her, the honor of a life-long companionship with a man like Doctor Queerington was almost overwhelming. She wanted passionately to be of use in the world, to make her life count for something. The opportunity of being of service to the Doctor, of helping him complete the great work that absorbed him, of ministering to his physical needs, and bringing joy into his life, assumed the character of a sacred privilege.

If haunting doubts and vague unsatisfied longings possessed her at times, she attributed them to that dear but unreal glamour of romance that the Doc-

tor had taught her must be expected to play for a while about the dawn of youth, but which fades away in the noon of maturity. And so not being skilled in the science of self-analysis, she fearlessly put her hand into the Doctor's, and promised to obey with a frank sense of relief at the shifted responsibility.

The new life into which she entered proved different in every respect from what she had expected. The Doctor's time, scheduled to the minute, admitted of no interruptions, however helpful from her. In fact, he seemed to regard her as a cherished luxury which he had no time to enjoy. The children accepted her according to their respective natures, Connie as a chum, Hattie as an arch enemy, and Bertie as an idol.

Hattie was fourteen, and had solved all the problems of the universe. She firmly upheld Aristotle and scornfully dismissed Plato from the world of philosophy. She disapproved of boys, of society, of second marriages, and she had four desperately intimate friends, all of whom were going to be authoresses. According to her observations she was the one person in the universe, excepting her father, who adhered to the truth. Hence her mission in life was to struggle single-handed against other people's inaccuracies.

Miss Lady found refuge from Hattie's caustic

comments in Bertie's immediate devotion. He had won her heart on the night of her arrival, when he had gone to sleep in her lap with a last injunction, that she "must stay with them always, until God sent for her."

Whatever ideas Miss Lady had cherished of taking charge of the domestic affairs were promptly discouraged by Myrtella, who had graciously consented to give the new mistress a month's trial, threatening that at the first interference she would abandon her to her fate.

Their first meeting was auspicious. Myrtella on returning from her afternoon out, had heard a wild commotion in the nursery and hastened up to investigate. Bertie's introduction was breathless:

"It 's the new mother, 'Tella, and Chick 's here, and we are playing bear, and we 've broken the bed-springs, and she knows heaps and heaps of stories, and she knows Chick!"

Myrtella, who had steeled herself for mortal combat, was not prepared for a foe who sat in the middle of the nursery bed, laughing behind a tumbled shock of shining brown hair.

"Oh! this is Myrtella, is n't it?" asked the bear, shaking back her mane and smiling with engaging frankness. "Bertie says you are Chick's aunt, and Chick 's an old friend of mine, is n't it funny?"

"Where 'd you ever know Chick?" demanded Myrtella with instant suspicion.

"We both live on Billy-goat Hill. We always wave to each other when I pass by, don't we, Chick?"

Chick, who was partially under the bed, still in his character of intrepid hunter, acknowledged the fact with such a torrent of enthusiastic incoherence that Myrtella interrupted sternly:

"Come out here this minute. It 's time for you to be going on home anyhow. First thing I know I 'll be getting complained at for having you hanging around so much. And look at your hands, Bertie Queerington! You are going to get put in the bath-tub right off, that 's what you are going to get!"

"I 'll bathe him," said Miss Lady eagerly.

"No," said Myrtella firmly, "there can't nobody but me manage him."

But in spite of the ferocity of Myrtella's aspect, there was a softened gleam in her eye that showed that the new mistress had begun by giving satisfaction.

The first few days after her arrival, Miss Lady spent in the dim parlor receiving callers. All the Doctor's relatives having survived their spasms of indignation over his marriage, united in a prompt determination to train up his young wife in the way

she should go. Advice as various as it was profuse, was showered upon her. At first she was amused; then she was inexpressibly bored; at last she was desperate. She was not used to being indoors all day, she was not used to spending her time with elderly ladies who talked of moral obligations, and social demands, and civic consciences. The duties of her married life which had promised such interesting responsibilities, and wonderful opportunities for aiding the Doctor in his great work, seemed to be shrinking into the dull task of keeping herself and the children out of his way, preserving a tomb-like silence in the house, and entertaining an endless round of callers.

Even this would have been bearable if the Doctor could only have taken time from his soul-absorbing work to listen at the end of the day, with amused tenderness, to all her little experiences, if he had discussed with her the best way of handling the children, laughed with her over her struggles with Myrtella, and encouraged those affectionate words and caresses that were so much a part of her nature.

If he could have done this, Miss Lady would have soon found satisfaction in lavishing her affection upon him. It was her bent to be passionately attached to those about her, and she was not one to stand still in a mental or emotional imprisonment.

But the Doctor was struggling through the most nerve-wrecking month of the year at the university. The beginning of a new term, the adjustment of classes, the enrolment of new pupils, all made a heavy drain on his weakened constitution. He was in no condition in the evenings to give out anything more, even to a young and devoted bride who was quite ready to relinquish any other pleasure to burn incense at the shrine of his learning.

The homesickness that had hung over her since the day she had turned her back on Thornwood would have enveloped her completely had it not been for Connie. Connie was but a year her junior, and was thoroughly disapproved by the family connection. She enjoyed the reputation of being frivolous and vain, and wholly lacking in reverence to her elders.

Connie's friends and amusements proved the line of least resistance along which Miss Lady raced to freedom. The tennis court served as a joyful substitute for the drab dreariness of the new home, and the free and easy companionship of Connie's friends a happy relief from the elderly feminines that invaded it.

The Doctor was still the majestic pivot, round which her thoughts swung, but the circle was growing wider and wider. The difference in their ages, which at first to her inexperience had seemed such

a trifling consideration, proved more serious as time went on.

She was eager for life, keen for pleasure, plastic, susceptible. Each new experience was to her an epoch, while to the Doctor, whose habits and opinions were fixed for eternity, it was usually but a fresh interruption to his work.

It was not that he failed to appreciate her. The light that came into his serious eyes whenever she was near, the unfailing courtesy and gentleness with which he spoke to her, the absolute freedom he allowed her, and the flattering appeal he made to her intellect, calmed whatever doubts might have risen in her mind.

Of her own feelings she dared not stop to think. Life was all so strange, so different from what she had expected. The flashes of doubt and perplexity that came in the pauses between Connie's closely planned festivities, she attributed to homesickness.

It was late when her last caller departed, and as she ran lightly up to the Doctor's study, she realized with a little sense of disappointment that she had not seen him since breakfast. Even now she paused at the door, for fear she would interrupt some flight of the muse. But on peeping in she found his big armchair drawn up to the window, and the top of a head appearing above its back. Tiptoeing cautiously

forward she clapped her hands over his eyes and dropped a kiss on his upturned forehead.

In an instant a strange, belligerent little gentleman had sprung to his feet and was confronting her with features that resembled those of a magnified and outraged bumblebee.

"I am so sorry!" stammered Miss Lady in laughing chagrin, "I — I thought you were the Doctor!"

"Even so," admitted the stranger rather firmly, standing with chin lifted and nostrils dilated, "even so. You seem to have forgotten the fact that Doctor Queerington is now a benedict!"

"Yes, but you don't understand. "I am —"

"A friend of Constance' no doubt. But under the circumstances you will permit me to say that such conduct is illadvised. I should not mention it were I not a friend of the family —"

"Oh! You are Mr. Gooch?"

"I am. And I have the pleasure of addressing —"

"Why, I 'm Mrs. Queerington," said Miss Lady, blushing furiously.

Mr. Gooch sank back into the chair and looked at her indignantly.

"Impossible!" he exploded. "They did not tell me — in fact I was not prepared — May I ask you not to mention my mistake to the girls? Constance, as you doubtless have discovered, is very

silly, given to making great capital out of nothing. We will not mention it."

"Ah!" said the Doctor in the doorway with his arms full of books. "How are you, my dear? How are you, Mr. Gooch? What is this conspiracy of silence?"

"It is only against the girls," laughed Miss Lady. "We 'll take him in, won't we, Mr. Gooch?"

The Doctor listened with tolerant amusement as Miss Lady gave a dramatic account of the double mistake, but Mr. Gooch failed to smile.

All through supper that evening Miss Lady tried in vain to propitiate the guest. His manner showed only too plainly that he regarded her as an intrusion in the family which he had seen fit to adopt. It was not until the pudding arrived that his mood mellowed. Myrtella's cooking was so eminently to his taste that he was willing to put up with a great deal for the privilege of enjoying it. Moreover, laughter always improved his digestion and the young person at the head of the table was proving amusing.

"Mr. Gooch is waiting for more coffee," announced Hattie, interrupting an animated account Miss Lady was giving of her first day at the country school.

"Let her finish the story," said the Doctor to whom food was immaterial. He was indulging in

the unusual luxury of loitering at the table after the meal was finished, a habit seldom tolerated in the Queerington household.

"But there is n't time," insisted Hattie. "Connie is having a party to-night."

"A party?" The Doctor's brows lifted.

"Yes," broke in Connie. "Miss Lady said she did n't think you 'd mind, and she persuaded Myrtella to let us dance in here. You won't mind the noise, just this one night, will you, Father?"

The Doctor considered the matter gravely. After all, his reading would be interrupted by Mr. Gooch, so he might as well assent. He seldom objected to any plan that did not interfere with his own actions. His absorption in the race precluded an interest in mere family matters.

"They are not pressing you into service, I hope?" he asked, glancing at Miss Lady.

"Indeed we are!" cried Connie. "She 's going to play for us to dance, when she is n't dancing herself. Of course we want her with us."

"You forget, Constance, that there are other claims upon her. Mr. Gooch and I would like to have her with us in the study."

Miss Lady looked up in pleased surprise.

"That settles it, Connie," she said; "you girls can play for yourselves. Come on and go to bed,

Kiddie," and with Bertie at her heels, the new mistress of Queerington raced down the hall.

For ten years Doctor Queerington and Mr. Gooch had played pinochle every Friday evening. The Doctor did not especially enjoy it, except as one of those incidents that grows acceptable by long repetition. He was a born routinist, regarding a well-regulated world as a place where everything ran in the same grooves to eternity. One of his chief sources of satisfaction in regard to his second marriage was that it promised not to interfere with those established laws which regulated his day, from the prompt breakfast at 7:15 to the long hours with his books in the evening. In short, Doctor Queerington was a sort of well-regulated human clock, announcing his opinions as irrevocably as the striker announces the hours, and ticking along so monotonously between times that one almost forgot he was there.

If the Friday evening game was to him merely a habit, to Mr. Gooch it was an occasion. Having once seated himself, and glanced around to make sure his hand was not reflected in a mirror, he spread his cards gingerly in his palm with only the corners visible, squared his jaw and proceeded with solemnity to observe the full rigor of the game. There was no trifling with points, or replaying of

tricks. The marriage of kings and queens was solemnized without rejoicing, and even the parade of a royal sequence brought no flush of triumph to his cheek, but moved him only to chronicle it in small, precise figures in a red morocco note-book which he always brought with him for the purpose.

When Miss Lady came up to the study, after giving Bertie two encores to " Jack the Giant Killer," she found the men silently absorbed in their game. Sitting on a hassock at the Doctor's side, she tried to follow the detailed explanation that he gave during each deal. But the jargon of " declarations," and " sequences," and " common marriages " soon grew wearisome, and she found herself idly studying the Doctor's fine, serious face, and listening for his low, flexible voice which unconsciously softened when he spoke to her.

In spite of the fact that the study was very warm these sultry September evenings, and the Doctor's mental strides much too long for her to keep pace, she nevertheless looked eagerly forward to the hours spent there. If at times she failed to follow his elucidations, or grew sleepy reading aloud from some well-thumbed classic, it was not because her admiration and respect for her husband were lessening. In fact, he was always at his best at this time, surrounded by the books he knew and loved, and expanding under the approbation of his one

appreciative listener. Here he reigned, a feudal lord, safe guarded in his castle of books against that strange and formidable enemy, the World.

"Four aces, and pinocle," announced Mr. Gooch with grim satisfaction.

Miss Lady rose restlessly and went to the window in the alcove. From the parlor below came the strains of a waltz and snatches of laughter; overhead the stars loomed big and white in the summer night. She thought how strange and lonesome it must be out at Thornwood with the lights all out and the windows nailed up. The little night things were singing in the garden by this time, and the cool breezes were beginning to stir the treetops. She wondered how Mike was getting along without her, and a lump rose in her throat. She swallowed resolutely, and smiled confidently up at the stars. Her married life was not in the least what she had expected, but it would all work out for the best. To be sure, nobody seemed to need her, nothing was required of her, but she would make a place for herself, she *must* make a place for herself. Perhaps if she had something to do besides playing with Connie and her friends all day, she would get over this feeling of uselessness, and this haunting homesickness for the hills and valleys, for her horses and dogs, and the old brick house among the trees.

Suddenly she caught her breath and listened:

"He 's coming home," Mr. Gooch was saying in the room behind her. "At least, they 've sent for him. Young Decker, who has just gotten back, says Morley will come on a stretcher rather than have people believe that he shot a man, then ran away. They had never heard a word of the indictment."

"As I expected," the Doctor said, shuffling the cards. "When does he return?"

"When he 's able to travel, I suppose. Decker left him down with a fever in a hospital in Singapore. He 's done for himself, I am afraid."

"Very probably," said the Doctor. "Poor Donald! It 's your lead."

Miss Lady slipped behind the curtain, and steadied herself by the window sill. Why had her heart almost stopped beating? Why was it beating now as if it would strangle her? Why did the thought of Donald Morley lying ill and friendless in a foreign hospital rouse every desire in her to go to him at once at any cost? Waves of surprise and shame surged over her. She heard nothing, saw nothing, save the fact that something she thought was dead had come to life. She was wakening from a long numb sleep, and the wakening was terrifying. What irremediable catastrophe had happened between now and that supreme moment when she had stood under the lilacs in the twilight with Donald

Morley's arms about her, his breath on her cheek, and his passionate plea: "Oh, if you only knew how I need you! I'll be anything under heaven for your sake if you'll only stand by me!"

"My game," said the Doctor. "Fortune has favored me. What became of Miss Lady? The call of the young people down-stairs grew too strong, I presume."

Mr. Gooch, in a very bad humor over the loss of the last game, sullenly packed his deck of cards in the case with the red morocco note-book and made ready to take his departure. The Doctor automatically placed the card table against the wall, arranged the chairs at their proper angles, straightened a book on his desk, and turned out the lights, leaving a slim white figure with trembling hands and terror-stricken eyes, cowering in the starlight behind the swaying curtains.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was always an occasion of significance when Mr. and Mrs. Basil Sequin found time in their busy lives to discuss a family matter. There was no particular lack of interest on either side, it was simply that their hours did not happen to fit. When he was not at his club, she was at hers; when she was dining at home, he was detained at a directors' meeting; when he went North to a Bankers' Convention, she went South to attend a bridge tournament. So it was small wonder the butler, removing the breakfast things, should have looked puzzled when Mr. and Mrs. Sequin remained at table in earnest conversation.

Mr. Sequin was a thin, stooped man, prematurely old at fifty. The harassed, driven expression that was so habitual to his face had plowed furrows that no lighter mood could now erase. His present mood, however, was not a light one. He sat with his hand shading his eyes, and scowled gloomily at the tablecloth.

"I told you a month ago," he was saying, "that you'd have to cut some of the expenses on the new

house. We 've already gone twenty thousand over the original estimate. There is n't a month now that our accounts are not overdrawn. Nothing has been said directly, but it is known on the street. Nothing will be said, as long as it is understood that I am to have the management of the Dillingham estate at the general's death, but if this estrangement should continue between Margery and Lee Dillingham —"

"Now, Basil!" Mrs. Sequin cried dramatically, "don't for mercy's sake take a nervous-prostration patient seriously. Margery is nothing but a bunch of notions, and Cropsie Decker has gotten her all stirred up about the injustice that has been done to Don. I won't even let her talk to me about it, it 's all so silly. What possible difference can it make who did the shooting? The boys are well out of the scrape and it 's almost forgotten by this time. Young people who are engaged have to have something to quarrel over; this won't amount to a row of pins. I am going right on making preparations for an early spring wedding. By the way, you know the bow window in the drawing-room? Well, I am having it made four feet wider so they can be married there facing the loggia, like this!"

Mrs. Sequin's two plump fingers did duty for the bride and groom, but Mr. Sequin was not interested.

"I should not be surprised if Decker cabled Donald to come home. He's in a great state of indignation over the fact that the blame was put on Don. You see, it is all a fresh issue with them."

"I'd be perfectly furious with Don," declared Mrs. Sequin, "if he came back and got into a quarrel with Lee. Margery will be sure to take his part; she's always so silly about Don. If she were well enough I'd be tempted to rush the wedding through before Christmas. But then, we could n't have it in the new house, and I have practically built that first floor for the wedding. Everything depends on our having it there."

"Everything depends on our having it somewhere!" said Mr. Sequin grimly.

"Mrs. Queerington's cook, madam, wishes to speak to you," announced the butler at the pantry door.

"Tell her to wait," said Mrs. Sequin without turning her head. "What did you decide about the decorator's estimates, Basil?"

"Decide? What time have I to be considering decorations? Why can't you attend to it?"

"Why, indeed? I only have to attend to the alterations on the bow window, look at the new sketches for the garage, have a shampoo and massage, lunch at the Welderns', take Fanchonette to the veterinary, be fitted at three, and go to the Bartrums'

at five. By all means, I 'll attend to it. I 'll give the order to Lefferan; he handles the most exclusive designs."

"That 's what we want," said Mr. Sequin, rising; "the most exclusive and the most expensive. Our credit is good for a few months yet. Have the small car at the bank at 6:30. I will not be home for dinner."

Mrs. Sequin sighed as he slammed the front door. There was no use denying the fact that men were trying, even the best of them. Had n't Cousin John Queerington, that paragon of perfection, toppled on his pedestal at the smile of an unsophisticated little country girl? And there was Basil, recognized as a veritable wizard of finance, waiting until the new house was almost completed, then getting panicky about the cost. And now Donald, whom she thought safely anchored on the other side of the world, threatening to come home at the most inopportune time and create no end of trouble!

"Excuse me, madam," said the butler, "but she says she ain't going to wait another minute."

"Jenkins!" Mrs. Sequin raised her brows disapprovingly. "Send that odious woman up to Miss Margery's room; I will see her there."

The room above the dining-room was one of those pink-and-white jumbles that convention prescribes for débutantes. Garlands of pink roses festooned

the paper, tied at intervals by enormous pink bows. Pink bows and ruffles smothered the dresser and sewing table, and pink and white cushions filled the window seat. Cotillion favors, old dance cards, theater programs, were pinned to the heavy pink and white curtains that shut out the sunlight. Among the lace pillows of the brass bed lay a languid, pale-faced girl, who stared up at the rose-entwined ceiling, as a prisoner might stare at her bars.

"Close the door, Myrtella," Mrs. Sequin said as they entered. "I am mortally afraid of drafts. Good morning, Margery. Where is your blue hat? I told Miss Lady to send up for it, because I am going to take her to the Bartrums' this afternoon and I simply could not have her appear in that ridiculous little hat she wears all the time."

The girl in the bed turned a fretful face toward her mother:

"Why, Miss Lady promised to spend the afternoon with me. I 've been looking forward to it for days."

"Yes, I know, dear, but I told her you were n't quite so well, and that she could come to-morrow. You see, she really can't afford to miss the Bartrums' tea; it 's the first entertainment this fall and everybody will be there. I know you think Mrs. Bartrum a little gay, but you can't deny she runs that younger set."

Margery Sequin clasped her thin white hands tensely, and resumed her study of the vine-covered ceiling.

"Here 's the hat," said Mrs. Sequin, handing a large hat box to Myrtella, then noting her offended expression she added by way of propitiation: "I don't know how they would get along without you at the Doctor's. I hear that the new mistress does n't know a saucepan from a skillet."

"She ain't no fool," returned Myrtella instantly on the defensive.

"Of course not, just young and careless. I dare say she does n't even order the groceries, does she?"

"No, mam."

"Nor plan for the meals?"

"No, mam."

"And you attend to everything just as if she were n't there? It 's really too funny, is n't it, Margery? Tell Mrs. Queerington that I 'll send the motor for her at five; and do see that she is properly hooked up."

Myrtella succeeded in getting herself and the box silently out of the room, but the butler passing her on the back stairs was startled by a verbal shower that was not in the least intended for him. It was as if a watering cart had suddenly and unexpectedly turned on its supply regardless of its surroundings.

At five o'clock Miss Lady, very radiant and ap-

parently in high spirits, presented herself at the Sequins'.

"May I come in just for a minute?" she asked at Margery's door. "I 've brought you some chrysanthemums. Uncle Jimpson brought them in from Thornwood this morning. It 's too bad you are n't so well."

Margery turned admiring eyes on the bright face above her.

"I 'm no worse," she said, "just disappointed. I thought I was going to have you all to myself this afternoon."

"But I did n't know you could have me! I 'll run in and tell your mother."

Mrs. Sequin, who was being insinuated into a very tight gown by the sheer physical prowess of her maid, exclaimed with satisfaction as Miss Lady entered:

"There, I knew it! The hat makes the costume. You are perfect! Now, remember the people I want you to be especially nice to, Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Marchmont —"

"The silly old woman that paints her face and wears the pearls like moth balls? She drove around yesterday to tell me the name of her hairdresser. It 's always the people that have n't any hair that want to have it dressed."

"Miss Lady! She is Mrs. Leslie Marchmont, the most sought after woman in town!"

"I don't care, her horses look as if they had been fed on corn stalks."

"But you must n't say such things! You must cultivate discretion. If you want me to introduce you to the right people —"

"But they may not be the right people for me! Some of them are lovely, but I can't stand the affected ones, nor the ones that patronize me."

"But they won't patronize you if you are a little more reserved. There 's no earthly reason for your telling them that you keep only one servant, and saying that you come from Billy-goat Hill. It 's a horrid name given our beautiful hillside, by horrid people. You see, you really must cultivate more caution. You are,— what shall I say? too frank, too natural."

Miss Lady laughed. "I have n't the least idea how to go about being unnatural, but, thank heaven, I don't have to learn to-day! Margery is feeling better and is going to let me stay with her."

"That 's absurd! You are all ready to go, and I want Mrs. Bartrum to see you for the first time just as you look now. Where are your gloves?"

"I forgot them, but it does n't matter, I 'm not going."

"I 'll send Jenkins for them at once."

Miss Lady's cheek flushed and she looked at Mrs. Sequin in perplexity, then her brow cleared.

"You are afraid I 'll stay too long and wear Margery out? I promise to go the minute she looks tired. You can trust her with me, can't you?"

"But she has her nurse, there 's no earthly reason —"

"Except that she wants me to stay. You 'll feel happier, too, knowing that she is n't lonely."

"But don't you want to go to the tea?"

"Oh, I did a little. But I think that was because you and Connie and Margery said I looked nice. I 'm awfully squeezed and uncomfortable; I wonder if Margery can't lend me a dressing sacque?"

Thus it was that Mrs. Sequin went off to the Bartrums' in a very bad humor, leaving the two girls chattering together in the pink boudoir, with the nurse banished to the lower regions.

"Don't you want some fresh air?" asked Miss Lady, when she had stood the heat as long as she could.

"You may open the door," said Margery, "we never leave the window up on account of drafts."

"But I can wrap you up, and put the screen up. There! You can't take cold with all that on. It 's the kind of day that makes me want to be on a horse,

galloping through the woods with the wind in my face."

Margery watched Miss Lady's quick motion as she opened all the windows behind the ruffled curtains, and let in a current of fresh invigorating air.

"How young you are!" she said. "Years and years younger than I feel. I can't realize you are married and have three step-children."

"Neither can I," said Miss Lady. "I 'm always forgetting it. Would n't you like to sit up for a while?"

"Oh! I can't. I have to lie perfectly quiet."

"Who said so?"

"Everybody does who has nervous prostration. The doctors say that my nerves are nothing but quivering wires. I suppose I went too hard last winter, but of course I could n't drop out in the middle of my first season."

"I don't believe it would hurt you a bit to sit up. If I fix that big rocker will you try it?"

"But I have n't sat up for six weeks. When I try it in bed I have such tingly sensations."

"That 's because your legs are straight out. Let 's try it in the chair, with them hanging down."

"I 'll try it, but I know I can't stand it. There! Thank you so much! You would n't think that a year ago I was as strong as you are! Why, be-

tween October and March I went to over a hundred and fifty entertainments, besides the theaters and opera."

"Good heavens!" cried Miss Lady aghast.

"Of course, about New Year's, I began to wobble, but mother had me take massage and electricity and kept me going until Lent. After that I collapsed until summer. Then we went to White Sulphur, where the Dillinghams have a cottage, I had to lie down every afternoon, but I was always able to be up for the dances."

The nurse coming in with a long flower box, paused in surprise at the sight of her patient sitting up, then discreetly tiptoed out again.

"Somebody has sent you some flowers!" cried Miss Lady excitedly. "How nice! Shall I open the box?"

"Just as you like. They are probably from Lee. He sends them now instead of coming."

"But there may be a note," said Miss Lady, searching in the tissue paper.

Margery shook her head wearily; the little animation that had flushed her face, died out leaving it wan and listless.

"I suppose you think this is a queer way for an engaged girl to talk," she said presently, with a nervous catch in her voice. "The truth is Lee and I have quarreled over my uncle, Donald Morley. I

will never forgive him for the way he has treated Don; never!"

"You will if you love him," said Miss Lady.

"But I'm not sure that I do!" burst out Margery. "I ought n't to say it! I shan't say it again, but I shall die if I don't talk to somebody. Mother won't listen to a word. She says it 's nerves. But the truth is, Miss Lady, I 've never been sure; that 's what 's making me ill!"

"Have you told him?"

"Yes, and he laughs at me. He may be right, they all may be right. When I get well I may laugh at myself. But just now it seems so terrible for the preparations to be going on while I 'm lying here, night after night, fighting down the doubts, trying to persuade myself, trying to be sure. How can you tell when you are in love? How do you know?"

Miss Lady's hand that had been softly stroking the girl's thin white fingers, paused; her eyes sought the open window, and she drew a short breath.

"Know?" she repeated as if to herself. "How do you know when you are cold, when you are hungry, when you 're tired, when you 're lonesome? How do you know that you want air when you are smothering? Everything about you tells you, your heart, your mind, your body, your soul. You can't help knowing!"

"But suppose I don't feel like that! And suppose I should, some day, for some one else! Oh! Miss Lady tell me what to do! Everybody else is rushing me on, telling me not to worry, not to be afraid. But you are not like the others, you consider something more than the outside advantages to be gained. Tell me, what would you do in my place?"

"I'd wait for the real one to come," cried Miss Lady, turning upon her almost fiercely, "I'd wait, if it was forever! They have no right to persuade you. You either love or you don't love and no power on earth can make it different. You can laugh at sentiment and pretend you don't believe in it, you can tell yourself a thousand times that you are doing the sensible thing. You can blind yourself utterly to the truth for a time. But some day you've got to realize that the only real thing in life is love, and that you are powerless to make it live or die."

After that they sat a long time in silence, until Miss Lady rose abruptly and, making some excuse, took a hurried departure. She was frightened at what she had said, at what she had thought. She was terrified at this strange, new self, that spoke out of a strange, new experience, and set at naught all her carefully acquired opinions. It was not until

she reached home after a brisk walk through the crisp air, that the turmoil in her brain subsided.

On the hall table beside a well-worn copy of Shelley, lay the Doctor's gloves and soft gray hat. She seized the gloves impulsively and laid them against her cheek.

"Dear, dear Doctor!" she whispered almost fiercely. "So good, and kind, and — and wonderful!"

Suddenly she was aware of some one watching her covertly through the crack of the dining-room door.

"Myrtella!" she cried. "Is that you?"

"Yes 'm, if you please," came in strange, meek accents. "I 'd like to speak with you."

It was so entirely out of the course of human events for Myrtella to assume humility, that Miss Lady looked at her in amazement.

"I can't say," began Myrtella, still half behind the door, "that I like the way things is run in this house. I 'm thinkin' some of givin' notice."

"Why, Myrtella!" cried Miss Lady in dismay. "I 'm afraid the work is too heavy. We might get —"

"Need n't mind finishin', Mis' Squeerington, you was goin' to say a house girl. If you think I 'd share my room with any Dutch or Irish biddy, I must say

you 're mighty mistaken! Besides, ain't I givin' satisfaction? Ain't I doin' the work to suit you?"

"Of course you are, but I thought you —"

"Was gettin' old, I suppose, and could n't do as much work as I used to. I look feeble, don't I?"

Miss Lady glanced at the massive figure with brawny arms akimbo, and smiled.

"Well, what's the trouble then?" she asked kindly. "Why do you want to leave?"

Myrtella's eyes shifted as she rubbed some imaginary dust from the door:

"I ain't used to working fer a lady that don't take no holt. It don't seem natural, and it leaves folks room to talk."

"But I thought you wanted to have full charge and run things just as you have done in the past."

"Well, it don't look right fer you not to be givin' me no orders, nor rowin' the grocery man, nor lightin' into nobody. If folks did n't know better they 'd think you was n't used to bein' a lady!"

Miss Lady bit her lip to keep from laughing.

"I 'll be only too glad to keep house, only I don't know much about it. Aunt Caroline and Uncle Jimpson did everything out home, and you 've done everything here."

"Well, I ain't goin' to no longer," said Myrtella firmly. "If you want to light in and learn, I 'll learn you. But I ain't going to stay except on one

condition, you got to take a holt of everything! You got to lock things up and give me out what I need. You got to order all the meals and tell me what you want done every mornin'. I ain't goin' to have people throwin' it in my face that I work for a lady that don't know a skillet from a saucepan!"

"You 're right, Myrtella," said Miss Lady, her face grown suddenly grave. "I don't wonder you are ashamed of me. Perhaps some good hard work will brush the cobwebs out of my brain. When shall I take charge of things, to-morrow?"

"As you say," said Myrtella meekly; then with a sudden flare, "though it does look like I might be trusted one more day to finish up the general cleaning and git after the ashman for not emptyin' them barrels."

"Friday, then?"

"Friday," said Myrtella as one who signed her own death warrant, and the young mistress gazing absently out of the window little guessed that a powerful usurper was voluntarily abdicating a throne in order that the rightful owner might come into her own.

CHAPTER XIV

THE red lamps were all lighted in Mrs. Ivy's small parlor, and the disordered tea-table and general confusion of the overcrowded room, gave evidence that one of her frequent "at homes" had been brought to an end.

It might have been inferred that the hostess had also been brought to an end, to judge from her closed eyes and clasped hands, and the effort with which she inhaled her breath and the violence with which she exhaled it. The maid, clearing away the tea things, viewed her with apprehension.

"Excuse me, ma'm, but will you be havin' the hot-water bag?" she asked when she could endure the strain no longer.

Mrs. Ivy opened one reluctant eye and condescended to recall her spirit to the material world.

"Norah, how could you?" she asked plaintively. "Have n't I begged you never to disturb my meditation?"

"Yis, ma'm, but this, you might say, was worse than usual. Me mother's twin sister died of the asthmy."

"Never speak to me when you see me entering into the silence. I was denying fatigue; now I shall have to begin all over!"

It was evidently difficult for Mrs. Ivy to again tranquilize her spirit. Her eyes roved fondly about the room, resting first upon one cherished object then upon another. Autographed photographs lined the walls, autographed volumes littered the tables. Above her head two small bronze censers sent wreaths of incense curling about a vast testimonial, acknowledging her valiant service in behalf of the anti-tobacco crusade. Flanking this were badges of divers shape and size, representing societies to which she belonged. In the cabinet at her left were still more disturbing treasures such as Gerald's first pair of shoes, and the gavel that the last president of the Federated Sisterhood had used before she had, as Mrs. Ivy was fond of saying, "been called upon to hand in her resignation by the Board of Death."

Before the error of fatigue had been entirely erased from her mental state, her eyes fell upon a pamphlet, and she immediately became absorbed in its contents. It set forth the need for a Home for Crippled Animals, and by the time she reached the second page she was framing a motion to be presented to her club on the morrow. Mrs. Ivy was greatly addicted to motions; in fact, it was one of her missions in life continually to move that things

should be other than they were, without in any way supplying the motive power to change them.

While thus engaged she was interrupted by a belated caller. He was a short, heavy-set young man, with a square prominent jaw, and a twinkle in his eye.

"*Mister* Decker!" exclaimed Mrs. Ivy, swimming toward him. "After all these months in those wonderful Eastern lands! I can almost catch the odor of sandalwood about you!"

"It 's dope," said Decker, with an easy laugh. "Chinese dope. I 've had these clothes cleaned twice, and I can't get rid of it. Had them on one night in an opium den in Hankow. Funny how that smell stays with you."

"An opium den?" repeated Mrs. Ivy, lifting a protesting hand. "And is no effort being made to stamp out such iniquities in China? Might not some concerted action on the part of the women's clubs in all the Christian countries create a public sentiment against them?"

Decker bit his lip as he stooped to pick up the leaflet she had dropped.

"Gerald 's here I suppose?"

"Of course! How thoughtless of me not to explain that I always insist upon the dear lad resting between four and five. He inherits delicate lungs from his father, and an emotional, artistic tempera-

ment from me. Then both of his maternal grandparents had heart trouble."

"Still hammers away at his music, I suppose?" Decker asked, minutely inspecting the photograph of a meek-looking female who appeared totally unable to live up to the bold, aggressive signature with which she had signed herself.

"Dear Miss Snell," Mrs. Ivy explained, "corresponding secretary of the A. T. L. A. If you had *only* come sooner you could have met her. What were you asking? Oh, yes! about Gerald's music. Why, you could no more imagine Gerald without music, than you could think of a bird without wings. He would simply perish without a piano. When we are abroad we rent one if we are only going to be in a place ten days. His Papa can't understand this, but then Mr. Ivy is not musical, poor dear; he really does n't know a fugue from a fantasie."

"Neither do I," said Decker. "Do the Queeringtons still live next door?"

"Yes. You know our beloved Doctor has married again."

"What! Good old Syllogism Queerington! you don't mean it! I wonder if he knows her first name? He taught me four years up at the University and never could remember mine."

"Oh! here 's my boy! Are you feeling better, dear?" Mrs. Ivy turned expectant eyes to the door

where a lean, loosely put together young man was just entering. He had the slouching gait that indicates relaxed ambitions as well as relaxed muscles, and his hands were deep in his pockets as if they were at home there.

"Hello, Decker, glad to see you," he drawled languidly. "Wish you 'd stir the fire, Mater dear; it 's beastly cold in here."

"I 'll do it," said Decker shortly.

Gerald Ivy dropped gracefully on the sofa, and became absorbed in examining his nails. He was rather a handsome if anemic youth, with the general air of one who has weighed the world and found it wanting. His eyes, large and brown and effective, swept the room restlessly. They were accomplished eyes, being capable of expressing more emotions in a moment than Gerald had felt in a lifetime.

As he idly turned the leaves of a magazine, he asked Decker how long he had been back in America.

"A couple of months, but I 've only been in town two weeks. Sorry to hear you are under the weather."

"Oh! I 'm a ruin," said Gerald; "a dilapidated, romantic ruin. Something 's gone wrong in the belfry to-day. Is my face swollen, Mater?"

Mrs. Ivy bent over him in instant solicitude.

"I do believe it *is* swollen, darling; just here. Look, Mr. Decker, does n't it seem a trifle fuller than the other side?"

Cropsie Decker's eye, not being trained by years of maternal solicitude, failed to distinguish any difference.

"No matter," said Gerald gloomily; "if it is n't then it 's something else. What 's the news, Decker?"

"The only news for me is this idiotic talk that has been allowed to go the rounds about Don Morley. That is what I came to see you about. What does Dillingham have to say about it?"

"Oh, you know Dill; he side-steps. The whole thing has blown over here months ago; the subject is as extinct as the dodo."

"Well, it won't be extinct long! I 've cabled Don to come home, and I bet he 'll stir things up. There 's nothing to hold him now that Margery Sequin 's broken her engagement."

"So sad!" murmured Mrs. Ivy. "I hope young Mr. Dillingham won't do anything desperate. To think of his cup of happiness being dashed from his lips —"

The two young men looked at each other and laughed.

"Don't worry about Dill, Mater. He has more

than one cup to fall back on. It is old man Sequin that may do something desperate. I hear they have made no end of a row, but Margery holds her own."

"They say on the street," said Decker, "that Mr. Sequin has been counting on the Dillinghams' money to reinforce the bank. He 's been going it pretty heavy the last two years."

"One cannot live by bread alone," quoted Mrs. Ivy; "our friends have been living the material life, they have forgotten that they are but stewards, and as stewards will be held accountable for the way they use their wealth. Mrs. Sequin makes absolutely no effort to advance the progress of the world. She has refused from the first to join the A. T. L. A. and she is not even a member of the Woman's Club."

"Well, I hope Mr. Sequin has n't been playing with Don Morley's money," said Decker, resuming the subject from which Mrs. Ivy had flown off at a tangent. "Donald has always left everything to him, and does n't know anything more about his investments than I do. All he is concerned with is spending his income, and that keeps him busy."

At this moment Norah appeared with fresh tea and cakes, making her way with some difficulty through the labyrinth of red lamps, small tables, foot-stools and marble-crowned pedestals that crowded the room.

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Ivy, "here are some of the little cakes, Gerald, that you love. You will try one, won't you? We have the greatest time tempting his appetite, Mr. Decker. He can only eat what he likes. I have always contended with his father that there was some physical cause for his craving sweets. I never refused them to him when he was a child. But from the time he was born he has never really lived on food, he has lived on music."

Gerald, at the moment regaling himself with his second cake, gave evidence that he did not rely solely on the sustaining power of music.

"And now, will you excuse me, dear Mr. Decker?" asked Mrs. Ivy, gathering her lavender skirts about her. "I am a very, very busy woman, and my desk claims much of my time. You will come to us again, won't you? Gerald's friends, you know, are my friends. *Good*-by." And with a tender pressure of the hand, and a lingering look she was gone.

Gerald waited until the door was closed, then produced cigarettes which he proffered to Decker.

"Mater's last hobby is tobacco," he smiled indulgently. "She is going to abolish it from the universe. Do you remember how Doctor Queerington used to hold forth on the subject at the university?"

"By the way, your mother tells me he has mar-

ried again. I don't know why, but that tickles me. Was she a widow?"

Gerald with his elbows on the arms of his chair and holding his teacup with both hands just below the level of his eyes, looked suddenly gloomy.

"No," he said. "I wish to Heaven she was one!"

"What 's the matter with Old Syllogism? I always thought he was a rather good sort."

"I 'm not thinking about him!" Gerald said impatiently. "I am thinking of the girl. She can't be much older than I am and the most exquisite thing you ever beheld. Her coloring is absolutely luminous. She ought to be painted by Besnard or La Touche or some of those French chaps that make a specialty of light. She positively radiates!"

"How did she ever happen to marry the Doctor?"

"Heaven knows! He captured her in the woods somewhere. I don't suppose she had ever seen a man before. Jove! You ought to see her play tennis, and to hear her laugh. She 's a perfect wonder, as free and easy as one of the boys, but straight as a die. Does n't give a flip for money or clothes, or society. Did you ever hear of a really pretty girl being like that?"

"I hope Doctor Queerington likes her as well as you do."

"Heavens, man! everybody likes her; you can't help it. But nobody understands her. You see they look on her as a child; they have n't the faintest conception of what she is going through."

"And you think you have?"

"I know it. She 's trying to adjust herself, and she can't. She 's finding out her mistake and making a game fight to hide it. When she first came she went in for everything. She had never played tennis or golf, and she got more fun out of learning than anybody I ever saw. Then suddenly she stopped. Some old desiccated relative told the Doctor it did n't look well for his wife to be running around with the young people, and that settled it. She gave up like an angel, and she 's not the kind that likes to give up either. Now her days are devoted to the heavy domestic, and her evenings to improving her mind in the Doctor's stuffy old study."

"Talking to the Doctor," confessed Decker, "always affected me like looking at Niagara Falls; grand, and imposing and awe-inspiring, but a little goes a long way. How is she standing it?"

"Getting thinner and paler and prettier every day. She 's a country girl, you know, used to horses, and outdoor exercise. She must have been beastly homesick, but she 's game through and through. It was awfully hard for her to bluff at first. That 's

because she is so honest. But she has had to learn. No woman, good or bad, can get through life without learning to bluff, only it comes harder for the good ones. What 's that confounded racket in the street?"

They rose and went to the window, Gerald looking over the shoulder of his shorter companion.

A superannuated gray mule hitched to a heavy cart had come to a standstill in the middle of the street, and a group of excited negroes were vainly trying to induce him to move on. With one ear cocked forward, and his forefeet firmly planted, the decrepit animal dumbly made his declaration of independence, taking the blows that rained upon his back with the dogged heroism of one who has resolved to die rather than surrender.

"By Jupiter, if those coons are n't fixing to build a fire under him!" exclaimed Decker. "They 'd rather fool with a balking mule than eat watermelon! Let 's go out to see the sport."

When Decker reached the porch, having left Gerald at the hall mirror, inspecting his face with minute solicitude, a new figure had appeared on the scene. It was a girl dressed in white, standing in the Queeringtons' yard, and as he looked he saw her suddenly dart out of the gate and into the street as if she had been shot from a cannon.

"Stop pulling his head like that!" she demanded.

"Don't you dare to strike him again. Take that fire away!"

The negroes fell back somewhat astonished, and the driver arrested his whip in the air.

"I 'll show you how to make him go," she went on; "put mud in his mouth. Yes, mud, a big lump of mud. There, that 'll do; make it into a ball, and put it in. Yes, you can! Oh, dear! Give it to me!"

She seized the mule's lower jaw with her thumb and forefinger, and with a deft movement succeeded in getting the unwelcome substance between the animal's teeth.

The mule evinced surprise, then curiosity. His fore feet relaxed, his eye lost its fire, and when a gentle pressure fell upon his halter, he was too engrossed in the new sensation to resist it.

"Bravo, Miss Lady!" called Gerald, sauntering forward to meet her. "I told you you were irresistible. What did you whisper in his ear?"

"Lots of things!" she said, accepting his immaculate handkerchief to wipe the mud from her hands, "but of course the mud helped. Uncle Jimpson taught me that trick. He says a mule has room in his head for only one thought at a time, and all you have to do is to change his balking thought for some other and he 'll go."

"I hope you will never have to put mud in my mouth," said Gerald, looking at her with no attempt

to conceal his admiration. "Can't you come over and see mother for a bit? She 'd love to give you a cup of tea."

"I don't like tea in the afternoon; it spoils my supper."

"Well, then, come over to see me. There 's a friend of mine I want you to meet. I 've been telling him about you."

"I can't. I 'm drawing pictures for Bertie. He 'll be disappointed."

"So will I. So will Decker."

"Decker?" Miss Lady flashed a glance at him. "You don't mean Cropsie Decker?"

"Yes, I do; the special correspondent for the *Herald-Post*. Is that sufficient inducement?"

Miss Lady looked at him rather strangely. "I 'll come," she said after a moment's hesitation.

They did not return to the parlor but to the music-room, a large room on the opposite side of the hall, which Mrs. Ivy, a firm believer in the psychological effect of color, had fitted out in blue to induce a contemplative mood in the occupants. On the mantel and tables were the same miscellaneous collection of bric-à-brac that characterized the parlor. Several pictures of Gerald adorned the walls, the most imposing of which presented him seated at the piano, with his mother standing beside him, a rapt expression on her elevated profile.

Miss Lady flitted about from object to object, asking questions, not waiting for answers, seeing everything, commenting on everything while the two young men stood side by side on the hearth rug and watched her. She was like a humming-bird afraid to light.

"Please, Mrs. Queerington," Gerald begged at last. "You know you don't care for those old kodaks. I 'll show them to you another time. I want you to talk to Decker. Sit down here in this big chair and I 'll sit at your feet, where I belong, and Cropsie 'll sit anywhere he likes and tell us about his adventures."

"But where 's your mother? I thought you said she was serving tea?"

"She 'll be down directly. Now, tell us a story, Decker. A man can't wander around the Orient for a year without having something exciting happen to him."

"I 'm afraid I have n't an experiencing nature," said Decker, smiling. "You ought to have Morley here. He 's the fellow that went over with me, Mrs. Queerington. I 'll back him against the field for having adventures. You remember that big fire last year in Tokyo? Don was the first Johnny on the spot, doing the noble hero act, dragging out women and children and gallantly fighting the flames, while I lay up in bed at the Imperial Hotel and fought

mosquitoes! He was in a collision at sea, just off the coast of Korea, got mixed up in a Chinese uprising in Nanking and was arrested for a spy while taking pictures of the fortifications at Miyajima. If I had half his luck I 'd be the highest priced man in the syndicate."

"I don't know that I particularly envy him his luck in the incident that happened here just before he left," said Gerald, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"It was nothing to his discredit," said Decker hotly. "He happened to be a witness when that fool Dillingham got into a shooting scrape, and he left town because he did not want to testify against the man his niece was going to marry. He did n't consider the consequences, he never does. It was a toss up when I met him in 'Frisco whether he would come home, or go on."

"Did n't he know he was indicted?" asked Gerald.

"Certainly not. Neither of us knew it until I got home and found people talking about 'Poor Donald Morley,' and acting as if he were a refugee from justice. Two or three letters came from Mrs. Sequin, but she was so busy urging Don to stay away that she had n't time to write anything else. We did get one old home paper, somewhere in Java, with an account of the trial. That was the first intimation Don had that Dillingham was throwing

off on him. Even then he could scarcely believe it; there 's nothing in him to understand a man like Lee Dillingham."

" But he was with him,— that night at the saloon," ventured Miss Lady, sitting up very straight and listening very intently.

Gerald smiled skeptically. " He went in out of the rain, my dear lady; that 's what he wrote home, I understand; and he did n't indulge in a single drink. Rather a strain on the imagination in the light of subsequent events."

" See here, Ivy," said Decker, rising and standing before the fire with his square jaw thrust out, and the twinkle gone from his eye. " I happen to know this story from beginning to end, and we both know Don Morley. He 's as full of faults as a porcupine is of quills, but he 's neither a liar nor a coward. If he says he was sober that night I 'd stake my life he was."

There was an uncomfortable pause during which Gerald tenderly felt his afflicted face, and Decker glared at the chandelier.

" He ought to have stayed to explain," said Miss Lady, not daring to look up; " a man's first duty is to himself and — and to those who care for him."

" That was the trouble," said Decker slowly. " It seems that the one person Don cared most about would n't listen to an explanation. He wrote her

full particulars, and asked her to telegraph him if he should go or stay. When I met him in 'Frisco he had been waiting for that wire for three days, and he was nearly off his head. I got him on the steamer almost by main force. We laid over ten days in Honolulu, and he got the notion that a letter would be waiting for him in Yokohama, and that he would take the next steamer home. All the way across I heard about that girl from the time the Chino brought our coffee in the morning until we went below again for the night. He all but said his prayers to her; cut out everything to drink; even refused to play a friendly game of poker. Why, I've tramped so many decks to the tune of that girl's charms that I could write a book about her."

"What is her name?" asked Gerald greatly interested.

"Heavens, I don't know! She was a wood nymth, a dryad, a jewel, a flower, I could keep it up indefinitely. He had a new one for her every day. When we reached Japan, he could n't wait for the steamer to dock but went ashore in the pilot boat, and made a bee line for Cook's. There was nothing there. It was like that at every port we touched. Each time he would get his hopes up to fever heat, and each time he 'd be disappointed. I never saw such perseverance and belief. He made excuse after excuse for her. He was too proud to

write again, and he got leaner and leaner and more and more homesick. You know that collision I spoke of? Well, he got in that by waiting over a steamer at Nagasaki in the hope of getting a letter before he left Japan."

"What happened next?" asked Gerald; "did another planet swim into his ken?"

"Hardly. The smash came just before I left him, a couple of months ago. We were at Raffles Hotel in Singapore having tea with some French girls from the steamer. Our purser happened along and gave Don a letter which I recognized as being from Mrs. Sequin. He read the first sheet, then looked up in a wild sort of way, and asked if we 'd mind excusing him as he had something he wanted to see to before the steamer sailed. At five o'clock he 'd never shown up, and I had to hustle our bags ashore and start out to look for him. He 'd been awfully seedy for a couple of months and when he got left I knew something serious had happened. I found him late that night in the foreign hospital out of his head with a fever. It seems the letter had told him that his girl was going to be married, and half beside himself he had gotten into a rikisha, and ridden for hours in the tropical sun, trying to face the fact. Of course in the run-down state he was in, it put him out of business, and by the time he got back to Raffles', he did n't know who he was, nor

where he was. I stayed with him until the *Herald-Post* sent for me to come home. Maybe you don't think I hated to leave the old chap, in that God-forsaken country, lying flat on his back, staring at the ceiling, with all his illusions smashed."

"Did he want to come with you?" asked Gerald.

"He did n't want anything. He had wanted one thing so long there was no more want left in him. I tried to get him to let me engage passage for him on the next home-bound steamer. But he said he doubted if he 'd ever come back, that as soon as he was able to travel he would go on around the world, and that it did n't make much difference where he landed."

"Quite a tragic little romance," Gerald said. "What a lot of mischief you women have to answer for, Mrs. Q.!"

But Miss Lady did not hear him, she was still eaning forward absorbed in Decker's narrative.

"If he comes home, in answer to your cable, when can he get here?" she asked.

"Not before Christmas I should say."

"If I were Lee Dillingham I should go South for the winter," Gerald said, going to the piano and striking a few random chords.

After Cropsie Decker left, Miss Lady sat very quiet in the big chair, while Gerald played to her.

It was well that only the kindly old bust of Liszt looked down on her tense white face, and clasped hands.

For over two months she had been fighting a specter, never daring to lift her eyes to it, but fighting it blindly, passionately, unceasingly. She had denied its existence, refuted every memory, filled her life to the brim with other interests, other affections, and here suddenly she had met it face to face, and it was no longer horrible, but a beautiful, radiant vision, a thing to be buried in her innermost being, a sacred, solemn thing, not to be looked at, or dwelt upon, but no longer to be denied.

The stormy, insistent strains of the "Appassionata" filled the room, surging through every fiber of her, lifting and abasing her by turns. How could she get hold of herself while Gerald played like that? She was sinking in a great sea of emotion and the music swept about her like a mighty gale, shutting out everything in the world but Donald Morley. He had not failed her, it was she who had failed him. He was coming home, and it was too late. She would have to meet him face to face, to see all that he had suffered in his eyes and speak no word. Surely she might give him this one hour, just while the music lasted; give it to him and to herself for the lifetime together they had missed.

She did not know when the music stopped, she did not know when Gerald came back to the hassock at her feet. He had evidently been there some time when she was aware of his elbow on the arm of her chair, and his head buried in it.

"Gerald!" she said, starting up; "what 's the matter?"

"Everything. Is that your trouble?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are unhappy," he said, catching her hand.

She sprang to her feet and snapped on the electric lights.

"Do I look as if I were unhappy?" she demanded, flashing on him her old, bright smile. "It was the music, and the twilight, and the way you played. That sonata ought never to be played except in a crowded room with all the lights on."

"It was n't the music," Gerald persisted; "you know it was n't. Something 's troubling you, and something is troubling me. May I tell you what is the matter with me, Miss Lady?"

He was looking at her very intently across the table, and Miss Lady for the first time recognized the danger signals in his eyes.

"Let me guess!" she cried, her wits springing to her rescue. "I *think* I know. I thought so when I first came in. It 's mumps!"

Gerald's hand flew instinctively to his face, and his eyes sought the mirror. Miss Lady, in applying to Gerald Ivy, Uncle Jimpson's remedy for a balking mule, had averted a disaster.

CHAPTER XV

TIME was an abstraction of which the inhabitants of Bean Alley took little notice. The arbitrary division of one's life into weeks and days and hours seemed, on the whole, useless. There was but one day for the men, and that was pay day, and one for the women, and that was rent day. As for the children, every day was theirs, just as it should be in every corner of the world.

On this particular fall afternoon, just outside Phineas Flathers' cottage, a lively game was in progress. It was a game known in Bean Alley as "Sockabout," and it had to do with caps or battered hats laid in a row, and with a small rubber ball that was thrown into them from a distance. Like many other apparently simple diversions, Sockabout had its complexities. In fact, the rules admitted of so many interpretations that an umpire was indispensable.

Under ordinary circumstances Chick Flathers would have scorned so passive a rôle as umpire, but to-day he was handicapped. In the first place he had no cap to contribute to the row on the ground,

and in the second he was burdened with a very large and wriggly bundle, which gave evidence of marked disfavor the moment he ceased to jolt it violently on his knees.

In the midst of an unusually fierce altercation, in which four boys contended for the same cap, Skeeter Sheeley's voice rose above the clamor.

"It 's our turn! Umpire says so, did n't you, Chick? Aw, you did, too! I kin understand you better 'n you kin understand yourself. 'Course it 's ours. Stop shovin' me, Gussie McGlory, I 'll swat yer in the jaw in a minute! Look out, Chick! Look out fer the kid!"

The youngest resident of Bean Alley was probably saved from premature death by the timely appearance of two ladies at the far end of the street.

Chick, recognizing the younger one, started joyfully to meet her, but at sight of her companion he stopped short. For two years he had regarded that plump, smiling, elderly lady as his arch enemy. She was after him. She wanted to put him in something that sounded like "The Willows Awful Home." Once she had almost gotten him, but Aunt 'Tella interposed. He was not afraid of the truant officer, nor of the cop, although they were generally after him, too, but he had horrible nightmares in which he saw himself being dragged into

captivity by this bland lady in the purple dress, who always smiled.

Just as he was seeking a hiding-place sufficiently large to accommodate himself and his charge, he was summoned home. Considerable commotion was apparent in the crowded kitchen and Mr. Flathers was moving about with an alacrity unusual to him.

"Git off your shoes and stockings, Chick, and turn your coat inside out. Here, I 'll hold the baby; yer Mammy 's nursing the other one. Shove that beer can under the stove, and hide that there cuckoo clock."

Chick followed instructions with the air of one who understood the situation. It was not the first time he had prepared hurriedly for visitors.

"They 're stopping at Jireses'," reported Mr. Flathers from the window. "Here, take this kid and set out there on the door-step. Don't you dare budge till they 've saw you and spoke to you."

Chick resumed his position on the door-step with a heavy heart. The line of battle had been pushed south, and he was completely out of the firing line.

His bare feet and legs were cold in the biting November air, and he had jolted the baby until he felt there were no more jolts left in him. It was, moreover, a terrifying business to sit there and calmly wait his fate.

"Them 's them!" announced Skeeter Sheeley, racing down the alley. "They give Mr. Jires some oranges. If they give you one, you goin' to gimme half?"

Chick was too miserable to answer. The bars of an institution seemed to be already closing upon him.

Mrs. Ivy, holding her skirts very high and picking her way gingerly around the frozen puddles, was the first to reach him.

"Ah! Here 's our good little friend Rick, or Dick, is it? And this is the sweet little baby sister that God sent you."

"Naw it ain't," said Skeeter; "that there 's a boy, an' it ain't no kin to him. Its paw 's in the pen, an' its maw 's up fer ninety days, an' its jes' boardin' at his house."

"The case that was reported for the Home," said Mrs. Ivy, turning with a significant nod to her companion who had just come up.

At the word "home" Chick shuddered. It was the most terrible word in the English language to him.

"What 's the matter with your thumb, old fellow?" Miss Lady asked, seeing his frightened look. "Come here, Skeeter, and tell me what he says."

She relieved Chick of the young person whose parents were not in a position to minister to his wants, and sat on the door-step between the two

boys, listening with flattering attention to a detailed description of each hero's wounds and scars and how they had been received.

Mrs. Ivy, meanwhile, a veritable spider in the midst of a web of institutions, was warily planning to ensnare every helpless, poverty-stricken fly that came her way. To her, the web was not made for the fly, but the fly for the web; supplying flies was her chief occupation.

Standing just inside the kitchen door with her skirts still gathered carefully about her, she viewed her surroundings with mournful sympathy.

"The fact are," Phineas was saying as he held his coat together at the collar, in a pretended effort to conceal his lack of a shirt, "that we ain't been prosperin' since you was last here. Looks like the hand of the Lord —"

"Ah, Mr. Flathers," remonstrated Mrs. Ivy, with a finger on her lip, "never forget that whom He loveth He chasteneth."

"I don't, Mrs. Ivy, I don't. I keep that in mind. If it was n't fer that, Mrs. Ivy, I declare I don't know what I would do. Now you comin' to-day was a answer to prayer! I just ast that some way would be pervided 'fore the rent man come back at six o'clock. I did n't say in my prayer *what* way, I just said *a* way, that *a* way would be pervided. And when I seen you and the young lady turnin' in

the alley, I sez to Maria, 'never try to shake my faith no more, the clouds has been lifted!'"

Mrs. Ivy, who was much more given to dispensing morals than money, shifted her position.

"Mr. Flathers," she said, looking at him with what she conceived to be a searching glance, "do you ever drink?"

Assuring himself that Chick had gotten the can quite out of sight, Phineas looked at her reproachfully:

"Me? Why, Mrs. Ivy, I thought everybody knowed that since I joined the Church — of course I ain't denying that there *was* a time when I knowed the taste of liquor. There ain't no good denying that, and, besides confession is good fer me, it humbles my spirit, Mrs. Ivy, it keeps me from being a publican."

"And tobacco?" queried Mrs. Ivy. "Liquor and tobacco go hand in hand, they are twin evils. Are you addicted to the use of tobacco?"

"Not me!" said Phineas, truthfully for once. "I ain't soiled my lips with a seegar for over twenty years, and you could n't git me to chew if you chloroformed me. Ef liquor is the drink, terbaccer is the food of the devil, as I see it."

Mrs. Ivy beamed upon him, as she opened the silver bag at her belt. "I shall report your case at our next meeting," she said with enthusiasm. "I

shall quote your very words. And now I am going to pin this little badge on you, this little white badge that tells the world you belong to the Anti-Tobacco League. You have the honor of wearing what few of our greatest statesmen can wear! You have proven that a humble laborer can lead the way to Reform."

Miss Lady appeared at this point with the Boarder, who like most individuals of his class, complained continuously of the quantity and quality of his food.

"You find us in a bad way, Mis' Squeerington," Phineas said, offering her a bottomless chair with the air of a Christian martyr. "If my sister Myrtella knowed the half of what we was passin' through she would n't continue to steel her heart against us."

"Myrtella's heart 's all right," said Miss Lady cheerfully; "she takes care of Chick, does n't she?"

"She does, mam, in a way. But there 's heavy expenses on a pore man with a family. Mrs. Flathers now ain't been able to have a see-ance since before the baby come. She did give one trance settin' yesterday, but she says she don't know what 's got into her, she feels so sort of weak like!"

"How long has she been taking care of this other baby?" Miss Lady asked.

"Most ever since ours come. The Juve*nile* Court

was looking round fer some one to nurse him till his maw got out of the jail hospital. I sez to Maria, 'Here 's a chanct to do a good Christian act an' earn a honest penny. We 'll take it in an' treat it like our own, sez I, an' the Lord will not fergit us, sez I!"

The Boarder, taking advantage of this assurance of hospitality, set up such a peremptory demand for food, that Miss Lady was compelled to walk the floor with him.

"Where is Mrs. Flathers?" she asked in despair. "Can't we give him a bottle or something?"

Maria, more limp, and inanimate than usual, came out of the dim interior of the adjoining room, carrying a yet more limp and inanimate bundle which she exchanged with Miss Lady for hers, and silently retired into the inner room where she was followed by Mrs. Ivy.

"An' this here is ours!" exclaimed Phineas, bending with sudden enthusiasm over the child in Miss Lady's arms, and tenderly lifting the shawl from the weazened face and tiny claw-like hands. "This here is Loreny. There ain't nary one of the rest of 'em lived over two weeks, an' this here one is goin' on four. Kinder looks like we 're goin' to keep her with us, don't it?"

Miss Lady could find no answer. The white lips and the blue circles about the small, sunken eyes,

bespoke the same disinclination to risk life under such circumstances as had been shown by all the other little Flatherses.

"Course she ain't like that other baby," Phineas went on with genuine earnestness, "but then he 's a boy, an' eats more. She 's goin' to git fat an' pretty, ain't you, Loreny?"

He put his coarse brown thumb into the little hand which closed about it and clung to it, and sat watching her, unmindful of his visitor.

"She don't look what you 'd call strong," he went on, anxiously, "but you would n't say she was sick, would you?"

"I am afraid I should," Miss Lady said gravely; "she looks very sick to me."

"She does? Then I 'd better git the doctor," Phineas rose hurriedly, then sat down again. "But he never done the others no good. Maria always contended it was him that killed 'em. Ain't there somethin' we kin do? Don't you know somethin'?"

"Yes, I think I do, only you may not be willing to do it."

"You try me. I 'll do anything you say, Miss. If the Lord will only spare her —"

"It 's not the Lord that 's taking her," Miss Lady cried impatiently, "it 's you that are sending her, Mr. Flathers. Can't you see that you are killing your baby?"

He looked at her in amazed horror.

"Yes, you are!" went on Miss Lady fiercely, "you are selling her food to another baby; you are letting her mother work so hard that she can scarcely nourish herself. Just look at Mrs. Flathers! Anybody can see that if she had better food and less to do she 'd be a different person."

"Oh, Maria was real pretty onct," Phineas said somewhat resentfully, "but when a man marries one of them slim little blondes he never knows what he 's gittin'. They sort of shrink up on yer an' git faded an' stringy."

"Yes, but think what she got," said Miss Lady determined to press the matter home. "Myrtella says you were a strong, handsome young man, who could have turned your hand to almost anything, and look at you now! A broken-down loafer, sitting around the saloons, talking religion while your baby starves. I don't wonder Myrtella is ashamed of you, I am ashamed of you, and if this poor little girl ever lives to grow up, she will be ashamed of you, too!"

"No, no," cried Phineas brokenly, his head in his hands, "she won't be that — if the Lord,— I mean if she lives, I 'll be a better man, Mis' Squeerington, indeed I will. Nobody ever will know in the world how much I want children of my own. That 's why I 'dopted Chick — that 's one reason I

took in this new one. Seemed like as if my baby went —"

"We 'll try to keep her," Miss Lady said with a rush of sympathy. "I 'll do everything I can but you must help, Mr. Flathers. You are willing to do your part, are n't you?"

His emotions, used to responding to false stimulants, being now appealed to by the one genuine feeling in him, threatened to become uncontrolled.

"There, there!" Miss Lady said, "if you really want to save her, I think there 's a way."

"Not a Orphan's Home?" asked Phineas, lifting one eye from the baby's petticoat where his head had been buried.

"No, a clean home of her own. There 's no reason why you should n't go to work, Mr. Flathers, and support your family decently. I 'll take Chick home with me. Myrtella will be glad to have him for a little visit. Mrs. Ivy is going to send the other baby to the Foundling's Home. Then you 'll only have to look after Mrs. Flathers and the baby; you surely can do that, can't you?"

"Yes 'm, I kin do that. 'Course any man kin do that. But I been out of a regular job so long, you 'd sorter help me find something to start on?"

"I 'll get you something to do, if you will only stick to it. Perhaps Mrs. Sequin can give you work

at her new house. She gave our old colored man, Uncle Jimpson, a place."

"Jes' so it ain't garden work, nor gittin' up coal, nor nothin' that brings on rheumatism."

"Have you rheumatism?"

"No, mam, Praise God! I have escaped this far by bein' kereful. You know what it means, Mis' Squeerington, when a man with a family gits down with the rheumatism. There 's Jires, now —"

"Yes, and Mr. Jires does more for his family lying flat on his back than you do for yours, up and walking around! You 're not fooling me one bit, Mr. Flathers, and there 's no use trying to fool yourself. You either mean seriously to go to work or you don't. Which is it?"

Phineas Flathers' strong impulse was to flee the scene. He saw his liberty vanishing before the awful prospect held out by this pretty young lady who could be so sympathetic one moment and so stern the next. But the tiny claw-like fingers of Loreny held him fast. He looked at his imprisoned thumb and smiled tenderly. Then he faced Miss Lady squarely for the first time.

"You help me git a job, Miss, an' I 'll promise to take keer of this here baby."

"What you need," came the murmur of Mrs. Ivy's voice from the next room, where she was taking leave of Maria Flathers, "is more beauty in

your home, something to uplift you and inspire you. I am going to send you one of our traveling art galleries, you may keep the pictures a whole week, long enough to learn the titles and the names of the painters. Just think what it will mean to lift your tired eyes to a beautiful, serene Madonna! And could n't you have more color in your home? We find color so stimulating. Scarlet geraniums for instance. Would n't you like some scarlet geraniums?"

"I dunno where we 'd put 'em at," Maria said wearily, shifting the weight of the Boarder to her other arm. Then her face hardened suddenly, and she wheeled into the kitchen.

"Flathers," she said, "it 's him coming round the house now. He said he 'd be back before six, an' would n't stand no foolin'. What you goin' to do, Flathers?"

Before Miss Lady and Mrs. Ivy could make their exit, the way was blocked by a heavy-set, muscular, one-eyed man who placed a hand on either side of the door jamb and unnecessarily announced that there he was. Frantic efforts on the part of Phineas to signify to the newcomer by winks and gestures, that the presence of guests would prevent his talking business, were without effect.

"You ladies 'll have to excuse me," said the intruder cheerfully, "but I can't fool with this bunch

no longer. It 's pay, or git out, this time and no mistake."

Maria began to cry, and forgot to jolt the Boarder, and the Boarder who insisted upon being jolted every instant he was not sleeping or eating, began to cry also. Whereupon Loreny, who had been laid upon the kitchen table, heard the noise and felt called upon to add her voice to the chorus.

By this time Chick and his colleagues, scenting excitement from afar, had followed its trail and now presented themselves breathless and interested to await developments. " Puttin' out " was not a particular novelty in Bean Alley, but the presence of guests added a picturesque feature.

" If you can wait a week longer," said Phineas with some attempt at dignity, " I 'll be in a position to settle up to date. I 'm expectin' to git a job —"

At this the rent man threw back his head and laughed, and the youngsters back of him laughed, and even the Boarder stopped crying a moment to see what had happened.

" But he really is," insisted Miss Lady, coming to Phineas' assistance. " He 's going to work the first of the week. Surely you can wait a week longer."

" I can, Miss! " said the man in the door, gallantly. " I been waiting a week longer on Flathers for more 'n two months. There ain't absolutely no

use in arguing the matter further. It 's pay up, or git out, *to-day.*"

" Well, if this ain't the limit!" said Phineas, with the air of one who had reached it many times before, but never such a limitless limit as this.

" But if we pay this month's rent for him, can't you let him make up the back rent later?" argued Miss Lady, trying to comfort Maria who threatened to become hysterical.

" When you 've known Flathers as long as I have, you won't talk about him paying up."

" But you can't put them out like this, with that little baby and no place to go!"

" There 's the Charity Organization, and the Alms House," suggested Mrs. Ivy, wiping her eyes through sympathy.

" I 'd hate to drive 'em to that," said the man doggedly, " but I got my own family to consider, and I ain't what I once was, since I lost my eye."

" Poor man," sighed Mrs. Ivy; " how fortunate it was the left one! How did it happen?"

" Shot out," said the man, nothing loath to enter into particulars. " In a scrap between a pair of young swells that was hangin' round my place. Shot out in cold blood when I was n't lookin'."

" But, my good man, did n't you prosecute?" asked Mrs. Ivy. " You know we have a Legal Aid Society for just such cases as yours."

Maria began to cry, and forgot to jolt the Boarder.

"Yes 'm, but one of the young gentlemen skipped the country, lit out fer foreign parts, took to the tall timber, as you might say."

"But he was not the one who did the shooting, was he?" asked Miss Lady, a sudden bright spot on either cheek, and the steady determination in her eye that had been Flathers' undoing.

"I ain't never been able to say which one done it," said the man, faltering under her steady gaze.

"Perhaps it was worth your while not to say?"

The man shot a quick glance of suspicion at her, then his eye came back to Phineas.

"Of course, I don't want to push him into the Poor House, and if he expects to get work —"

"I do, Dick," said Phineas fervently. "Monday morning I put my shoulder-blade to the wheel somewhere."

"Well, if the ladies 'll stand for this month," said the man, evidently anxious to get away, "I 'll wait a week longer on the back rent."

Miss Lady was preoccupied and silent on the way home. The world sometimes seemed desperately sordid, and human nature a baffling proposition.

At her gate Mrs. Ivy halted suddenly: "Do you know," she said, "it has just occurred to me! I should n't be one bit surprised if that horrid one-eyed man was the very one Mr. Morley shot!"

CHAPTER XVI

CHRISTMAS night on Billy-goat Hill, and twinkling lights, beginning with candles set in bottles in the humblest cottages in Bean Alley, dotted the hillside here and there, until they all seemed to converge at one brilliant spot on the summit, where a veritable halo of light hung above the hilltop.

For Angora Heights was having a house-warming, and never since old Bob Carsey brought home his young bride from Alabama, had such preparations been known for a social function. All the carriages in the neighborhood had been pressed into service, and a half dozen motors had been sent out from town to convey the guests from the station to the house.

Within the mansion everything was magnificently new. Period rooms, carried out with conscientious accuracy, opened into each other through arcaded doorways. Massive gilt mirrors accentuated the wide spaces of the hall, and repeated the lights of innumerable chandeliers. If a stray memory or an old association had by any chance crept into the

Christmas ball, it would have found no familiar object on which to dwell. The atmosphere was as formal and impersonal as that of a museum.

In the middle of the drawing-room, like a general issuing last orders before a battle, stood Mrs. Sequin, her ample figure encased in an armor of glistening black spangles, and her elaborately puffed coiffure surmounted by an incipient helmet of blazing gems.

"Pull those portières back a trifle," she commanded, "and lower that window from the top. Has Jimpson gone to the station for the Queeringtons?"

"Yes, madam, half an hour ago," answered the maid.

"The moment he returns tell him that he is to take the small wagon and go back to the station at ten o'clock. The caterer has just 'phoned that he is sending the extra ices out on the last train, but that he cannot send another waiter. Jenkins, leaving the way he did, has upset everything. I suppose it is too late to get anybody now; the special car gets here at nine. What is that noise? It sounds like some one singing in the dining-room."

"It 's the new furnaceman, madam, that Mrs. Queerington sent. It looks like he can't keep himself quiet."

"I 'll quiet him!" said Mrs. Sequin, who was as near irritation as full dress would permit.

Phineas Flathers, having replenished the fire, was pausing a moment to admire himself in the Dutch mirror above the mantel when Mrs. Sequin startled him by inquiring peremptorily if he was the new man.

"I am," said Phineas with pronounced deference, "*the* new man and *a* new man. Regenerated, born again, mam, the spirit of evil having departed from me."

Mrs. Sequin gasped. "What is your name?"

"Flathers, mam."

"Dreadful! I will call you Benson."

"Benson it is. Better men than me have changed their names. There was Saul now, Saul of Tarsus —"

"Turn the drafts off in the furnace and don't come up-stairs again on any account. But no,— wait a moment." Mrs. Sequin's keen eye swept him from head to foot. "Have you ever had any experience in serving?"

Phineas, whose only claim to serving was that "they also serve who only stand and wait," dropped his eyes.

"Only the communion, mam, and the collection. But I ain't above lending a hand, mam. You 'd do as much for me. I was just saying to the lady in

the kitchen, that anybody was fortunate to work for a person with as generous a face as yours."

"Clean yourself up, and put on Jenkins' coat, and if another waiter is absolutely necessary, they can call on you," directed Mrs. Sequin hurriedly, then calling to the maid, "Has Miss Margery come down yet?"

"She 's in the library, mam."

Margery, pale and listless, turned from the window as her mother entered.

"I was just watching for Miss Lady," she said; "it will be rather amusing to see her and Connie at their first big party."

"I hope she won't wear that childish dress she was married in. It is all right for Connie to affect white muslin and blue ribbons, but Cousin John's wife ought to wear something that makes her look older. Why, with that short gown, and the way she wears her hair, she looks like a schoolgirl!"

"She looks very beautiful."

"Of course she does, but what good does it do her? Here at the end of four months she has made practically no headway. Not that she did n't have every opportunity! People were quite ready to take her up, but she simply would n't let them. What can you expect of a person who says that bridge and boned gowns make her back ache? She has n't an idea in her head beyond the Doctor, the children

and a lot of paupers. I must say I am terribly disappointed in her. But then I ought to be used to disappointments by this time. What will she be when she 's middle-aged? "

" She 'll never be middle-aged," Margery smiled; " she 'll go on being young and making people around her feel young. Father says she is the only person he knows who makes him forget his age. By the way, where is Father? "

" Delayed in town as usual. He 'll probably motor out when the evening is half over and be too tired to be polite. I 've never seen him so upset. Of course it 's your broken engagement. He says we may have to close the house, now that we 've gotten into it, and go abroad to reduce expenses, but of course that 's ridiculous! That reminds me, did the Hortons send regrets? "

" She did," said Margery absently.

" Oh, dear, that means he 'll be here! He 's so horribly fastidious, he 's sure to make remarks about my putting an Italian loggia on a Louis XVI drawing-room. It does seem that with all the time and money we 've spent on this place — Is n't that the carriage? "

" Yes, I hear Miss Lady laughing."

As the front door swung open two bundled-up figures hurried into the hall, bringing a gust of youth and merriment along with the keen night air.

"I hope we are the first guests," cried Miss Lady, shaking a scarf from her head, "because we have had an accident. We both fell down. Connie slipped on the step and I sat down on top of her. There was an awful rip and we don't know whose it is! I'm afraid to take my coat off!"

"But where is the Doctor?" cried Mrs. Sequin in dismay.

"Father would love to have come," began Connie glibly, but Miss Lady broke in:

"I don't think he really wanted to come, Mrs. Sequin. He said he would be ever so much happier up in his study, playing pinocle, than sitting out here in a straight-back gilt chair eating ice cream. Perhaps you think I ought n't to have come without him?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Sequin. "I get perfectly exasperated when Cousin John does this way. There were at least a half dozen people I 'd promised to introduce to him. If he had no consideration for me he ought to have for you. He has been keeping you at home entirely too much. He forgets that you are twenty years his junior; he expects you to act as if you were forty."

"No, he does n't," protested Miss Lady loyally; "the Doctor never expects anything of anybody that is n't right. He urged me to come, did n't he, Connie?"

But Connie was absorbed in a trailing flounce that hung limply about her feet.

"Look!" she cried tragically; "it's torn clear across the front. What shall I do?"

"Margery's gowns would all be too long for you," said Mrs. Sequin, viewing the rent through her lorgnette, "perhaps Marie can do something with this."

"I won't wear it all tacked up!" cried Connie on the verge of tears; "I'll go home first —"

"No, you won't," said Miss Lady; "this is your first grown-up party and you've been counting on it for weeks. You are going to change dresses with me. I don't mind a bit being hiked up a little, and, besides, nobody's going to notice me."

"That's perfectly absurd!" exclaimed Mrs. Sequin indignantly; "you *must* remember who you are, and that everybody is noticing you. Why can't *you* wear one of Margery's dresses, and let Connie have yours?"

"All right, I'll wear anything you say. Don't you dare cry, Connie! I'll never forgive you if you make your nose red. Listen! The musicians are tuning up! May I have the first waltz, madam?" and seizing Mrs. Sequin by her plump gloved hands, she danced that august person down the long hall.

"Let me go, you ridiculous child," laughed Mrs. Sequin, hurrying her up the steps; "the motors are coming up the hill now. Make her look as pretty as you can, Marie, and hurry!"

At a distance the brilliant, moving lights of automobiles and the dimmer ones of carriages could be seen approaching, and very soon under the blaze of the porch lights, hurrying figures in furs, rustling satin, and soft velvets were being ushered formally into the big reception hall.

Mrs. Sequin, mounted on her highest social stilts, stood with Margery in the alcove, so carefully planned for another occasion. A ball to be sure was a poor substitute for a wedding, but Mrs. Sequin was not one to waste her energies on vain regret. The ball was going to be a success; already the rooms were filling rapidly with the people Mrs. Sequin most desired to see. Old Mrs. Marchmont had risen from a sick bed to drive out from town and bare her ancient bones in honor of the occasion. Mrs. Bartrum had taken possession of the most becoming corner in the library and was holding gay court there; the young people were thronging from one room to another; everybody was laughing and chatting and exclaiming over the charms of the new house. In fact the complacency of the hostess over her achievement was only surpassed by the curiosity

of the guests who were confirming with their own eyes the wild rumors which had been current of the Sequins' extravagance.

Mr. Horton, the local architect who had not been considered of sufficient renown to make the plans for the house, wandered from room to room on a quiet tour of inspection. Mrs. Sequin's fears of his judgment were not without cause, for Mr. Horton was one of those critics whose advice one always ignores but whose approval one ardently desires. He was a trim, immaculate person with short, pointed beard, and narrow, critical eyes that always seemed to be taking measurements. Passing from the Dutch dining-room, with its blue tile, and old pewter, he paused in the doorway of the drawing-room where the dancing had already begun. His glance, taking in everything from the gilded fluting of the panels to the bronze heads on the upright lines of the marble mantels, rested at last upon an object which evidently gave his critical taste complete satisfaction.

A young girl had paused near him and was eagerly watching the dancers. She presented a harmony in green and gold, from her shining hair caught in a loose coil low on her neck, to her small gold slippers that tapped time to the music. The clinging gown of pale green that fell in loose lines from her shoulders was veiled in deep-toned lace,

revealing her round white throat and long shapely arms, bare from shoulder to finger tips. Horton smiled unconsciously as he watched her eager, responsive face, and felt the suppressed vitality in every movement of her slender body.

"Who is she?" he asked of Cropsie Decker, who stood near.

"Who 's who?"

"That radiant young thing in green. She does n't belong in a ballroom, she belongs in a forest with ivy leaves in her hair. By Jove, look at the lines of her, and the freedom of her movements. I have n't seen such arms in years!"

Cropsie followed his glance: "Oh, that 's the new Mrs. Queerington,— the wife of John Jay, you know."

"But I mean the young girl going through the door there, with the wonderful hair, and the profile?"

"That 's Mrs. Queerington. Is n't she a stunner? Everybody 's talking about her to-night. I 'll introduce you if you like."

Horton followed him around the outer edge of the dancers, still confident that Cropsie had made a mistake. But when he was duly presented there was no longer room for doubt.

"I hope I 'm not too late to claim a dance," he said. "I always make it a point to dance but once

during an evening, and that with the most beautiful woman on the floor. I hope you aren't going to let these young sharks cut me out of my dance?"

Miss Lady lifted a pair of sparkling, excited eyes to his. From the moment when she had appeared, half timidly in her borrowed feathers and taken refuge under Mrs. Sequin's experienced wing, she had been the sensation of the evening. Adroitly conveyed from one group to another she had left enthusiasm in her wake. She was evidently enjoying to the utmost the novelty of receiving homage from one black-coated courtier after another, and of hearing delightful things about herself. The only apparent drawback to her pleasure was when she was compelled to say as she did now:

"Thank you ever so much, but I 'm not dancing."

"Not dancing?" repeated Mr. Horton, not unmindful of the whiteness of her shoulders against the dark marble of a neighboring pedestal,—"Why not?"

"The Doctor and I have given up dancing."

"Oh, so he does n't allow you to dance?"

"Allow me?" she lifted her level brows, smiling. "He simply does n't care for it."

"And you don't care for it either?"

"Oh, yes, I do, I care for it too much. That 's why I 'm not dancing."

"But you *are* dancing. You 've been dancing

ever since you came in. I've watched you. Might n't you just as well be dancing with me, as dancing by yourself?"

She laughed and shook her head, but her foot continued to pat the time, and her eyes followed the swaying couples that swung past.

"What 's the Doctor's objection?" Mr. Horton urged.

"He thinks it 's undignified for married women to dance, and I guess I do, too, only —" Miss Lady sighed,—"you see, I keep forgetting that I *am* a married woman!"

"You certainly make other people want to forget it," then his eyes dropped before the childlike candor of her gaze. "Come now, Mrs. Queerington, are n't you taking matrimony a little seriously?"

"Perhaps I am, but I 'm new, you know, and I 've an awful lot to learn."

"Has n't it ever occurred to you that the Doctor might have something to learn?"

"No," she said brightly, "he knows everything. I sometimes wish he did n't. I 'd be proud if I could teach him even *that* much!" and she measured off the amount on the tip of her little finger.

"Perhaps he is n't as good a pupil as you are. You should take him to see 'Harnessing a Husband,' at the Ardmore this week."

"A play? I'd love to go to the theater just once."

"You've never been? How extraordinary! Come with Mrs. Horton and me on Friday night and let us share your first thrill."

"May I?" Miss Lady began eagerly, then checking herself, "I'm afraid the Doctor doesn't care much about the modern stage. He used to enjoy seeing the great actors, but he says the plays they put on now bore him fearfully. May n't we come to call sometime instead?"

"As you like," said Mr. Horton, shrugging, "but I hope you realize that you are spoiling that learned husband of yours. Instead of adapting yourself to him, make him adapt himself to you. Come now, isn't it about time for you to reform? Why not begin by finishing this dance with me?"

Still she laughed and shook her head. "It isn't that I don't want to! I'd rather dance than do anything in the world — except ride horseback."

"I might have known you were a horsewoman. Do you ride much?"

"Not now."

"The Doctor doesn't care for it, I suppose?"

She flashed a questioning glance at him, then she looked away:

"No," she said, "he doesn't care for it."

Cropsie Decker, who had been hovering in her

vicinity, now came up and claimed the next number.

"There 's a bully little corner in the conservatory where we can sit out this waltz. You won't mind if I carry her off, Mr. Horton?"

"Not if she takes to heart some of the wise things I 've been telling her," said Horton, looking at her through his narrow eyes and pulling at his small, fair mustache. "Au revoir, Madame Beaux Yeux!"

Miss Lady did not move from the spot where he left her. Out under the palms in the hall, the orchestra was beginning one of Strauss' most distracting waltzes; her fingers tapped the time. Suddenly she held out her hand to Cropsie.

"I can't stand it another minute! I 've got to dance once if I never dance again!"

Every eye in the ballroom followed the slender figure, as it circled in and out among the throng. Miss Lady danced with the grace and abandonment of a child. She had given herself utterly to the joy of the moment. She was letting herself go for the first time since her marriage, following the glad impulse of her heart, and dancing as a Bacchante might have danced alone on a moonlight night in some forest glade.

When at last the music stopped Cropsie drew her into the conservatory.

"Here, come around this palm, quick! They'll all be after you for the next dance. Gerald Ivy is charging around now looking for you, and so is Mr. Horton. Sit there in the window and cool off!"

She sank laughing and breathless on the window sill. All the exhilaration of the dance was in her eyes, her lips were parted, her cheeks flushed, and a strand of loosened hair fell across her shoulder.

It was at this moment that wheels sounded on the driveway below, caused her to lean idly out to see who was coming. A wagon stopped at the side entrance, and a man alighted. Uncle Jimpson's voice was heard asking a question, then came the other man's voice, in quick, incisive answer.

Miss Lady, sitting motionless, looking down, turned suddenly from the window. The color had left her face and her hand trembled visibly against the curtain.

"What's the matter?" cried Cropsie; "are you ill? Did you dance too long?"

"It's nothing, I'm all right. That is I will be—"

"Can't I get you some water, or an ice, or call Mrs. Sequin?"

"No, no, please! It's nothing. I'll slip off to the dressing-room until I feel better. I can go through here up the side stairs."

"Wait, I 'll go with you. You are as white as if you 'd seen a ghost!"

But before he could join her she had disappeared into mysterious regions where he dared not follow.

CHAPTER XVII

DURING the course of that Christmas night, there was one member of the Sequin household who failed to thrill with the holiday spirit, and whose depression steadily increased as the evening wore on. The great occasion of which Uncle Jimpson had dreamed all his life, had at last arisen, and instead of being allowed to rise with it, and prove his indisputable right to butlerhood, he had been detailed to drive back and forth to the station over that same humdrum Cane Run Road that he and Old John had helped to wear away for the past quarter of a century!

To be sure, a neat depot wagon and a spirited young sorrel had replaced the ancient buggy and the apostolic nag, but these fell far short of Uncle Jimpson's dreams. A coach and four at that moment would not have compensated him for the fact that a complaisant, red-headed furnaceman, a "po' white trash" arrived but yesterday, was being allowed to pass the tray that by all rights of precedence belonged to him.

Waiting impatiently at the station for the train that was to bring the elusive ices which he had been pursuing all evening, he at last had the satisfaction of seeing the small engine crawl out of the darkness, and come to a wheezing halt.

So engrossed were the conductor and brakeman and Uncle Jimpson in safely depositing the freezers on the platform, that no one noticed a passenger who had alighted. In fact, it was not until Uncle Jimpson heard Mrs. Sequin's name that he paused from his labor and looked up.

The stranger was a young, well-built man, wearing a long, shaggy overcoat, and a cap of a foreign cut that excited the immediate envy of the brakeman. The bag and the suit case which he carried were covered with foreign labels, and he had the air of a person who is suddenly dropped down in a strange place and does n't quite know what to do with himself.

"You say you want to git up to Mrs. Sequin's to-night?" Uncle Jimpson eyed the bags suspiciously. "'Scuse me, sir, but you ain't sellin' nothin', is you?"

The laugh that greeted this was so spontaneous, that Uncle Jimpson hastened to apologize:

"I nebber thought you wuz, only we was n't lookin' fer no railroad company, an' I 'lowed you did n't look lak you wuz comin' to de party."

"What party?" asked the man, his look of amusement giving place to one of dismay.

"Our-alls party. We 's havin' a ball an' a housewarmin'. You must be comin' fum a long ways off not to be hearin' 'bout hit!"

"You mean the Sequins are having a party, to-night?"

"Yas, sir."

"But are n't they expecting me? Did n't they get my telegram?"

"I dunno, sir. Dey nebber said nothin' to me."

The stranger stood with feet apart, watch in hand, and a grim expression on the only part of his face visible between his cap and his upturned collar.

"What time is the next train back to town?"

"Dey ain't none, 'ceptin' de special, what 's hired to take de party back to town. Dat goes 'bout two o'clock."

"I 'll wait for it," said the stranger, flinging his bag against the waiting-room door and beginning to pace restlessly up and down the snow-covered platform.

But this did not meet with Uncle Jimpson's ideas of hospitality.

"Dey nebber knowed you wuz comin'," he argued. "I jes know dey did n't. But dat won't hinder 'em fum bein' powerful glad to see you. Better git in, Boss, an' lemme dribe you up dere."

"No, there is evidently more room for me in town!"

"Room! Why, Mister, we could take keer of all de Presidents of de Nunited States at one time! 'Sides, hit don't look right to leave you a stompin' round here in de cold fer three or four hours by yourself. You 'd git powerful lonesome."

"I 'm used to being lonesome. Have n't been anything else for a year."

"But dis heah is different," urged the old darkey, scratching his head; "dis heah is Christmas night. Tain't natchul fer folks not to git together an' laugh an' be happy an' fergit dere quarrels an' dere troubles an' jollify deyselves. You know you ain't gwine be happy stompin' round here in de dark by your loneself; you know dat ain't no way to spend Christmas, Boss!"

The stranger continued to stare into the darkness for a moment, then he laughed, that same sudden, infectious, boyish laugh that had greeted Uncle Jimpson's suggestion that he was an agent.

"You 're right!" he exclaimed; "this is no time to nurse a grouch. Perhaps they did n't get the telegram. I 'll risk it. Is there a side door you could slip me in?"

"Yas, sir! We got four side doors, 'sides de back one. Ain't nuffin we ain't got. You git right in de wagon, an' I 'll hist de bags in. 'Tain't de

way I 'd like to kerry you up to de mansion, straddlin' a ice-cream freezer wid de snow in yer face, but I 'll git you dere!"

Uncle Jimpson, sure of an audience for at least twenty minutes, forgot his wrongs and laid himself out to make the most of his opportunity.

It was very cold and the horse's hoofs beat hard on the frozen ground. Beyond the wavering circle of light from the swaying lantern all was dark and mysterious.

"I certainly is glad dem freezers come," said Uncle Jimpson, tucking in the lap robe; "I shore would hate to go back widout 'em. De Cunnel used to say dat was what niggers was born fer, to git what you sent 'em after."

"Who is the Colonel?" asked the stranger with a quick glance of recognition at the old negro.

"Cunnel Bob Carsey. My old marster. He 's dead now, an' Mrs. Sequin she 's done borrowed me fer a while."

"When did he die?"

"A year ago las' May."

The man in the foreign cap pulled it further over his eyes and resumed his scrutiny of the road.

"Al dis heah hill used to b'long to us," Uncle Jimpson continued; "long before de Sequinses ever wuz born. I spec' you 've heard tell of Thornwood?"

"Yes. Who lives there now?"

"Nobody. When de Cunnel died, my young Miss did n't hab nobody to take keer ob her, nor no money to run de place, no nothin' 'ceptin' jus' me an' Carline. Dey was n't nothin' left fer her to do but git married."

A long pause followed during which the traveler watched the distorted shadow of the trotting horse as it shambled along the road.

"'Course," the old darkey broke out presently, "Doctor Queerington is a powerful smart gemman, an' he teks keer ob her jes' lak she wuz one ob his own chillun. An' she 's gittin' broke into de shafts, but hit 's gwine hard wid her. 'Tain't natchul to hitch a young filly up to a old kerriage horse an' spec' her to keep step. She sorter holdin' back all de time, kinder 'fraid to let loose an' carry on same as she use to."

They were going through the covered bridge now and the rattle of the wheels on the loose boards made conversation difficult.

"Wuz you eber homesick, Boss?" asked Uncle Jimpson inconsequently.

"Rather," said the stranger emphatically. "I was born homesick."

"Well, dat 's what ails my young Miss an' dat 's whut 's de matter wid me an' Carline an' Mike. Ain't none ob us used to libin' in other folks' houses

an' mixin' up wid other folkses families. 'Course hit 's mighty fine to be rich an' put on airs, but hit 's lonesome. 'Fore hit got so cold, me an' Carline 'd go down home most ebery night an' set round de quarters, listenin' to de frogs an' de crickets, an' I 'd say, 'Carline, don't you mind de time dat Miss Lady fell head fust into de barrel ob sorghum? An' de time she made de chickens drunk offen egg-nog?' Nebber wus nobody in de world lak dat chile, up to ever mischievousness dat ever wuz concocted, but jus' so sweet an' coaxin' dat de Cunnel nebber knowed how to punish her."

The stranger took out a meerschaum pipe, started to light a match, evidently forgot his intention, and looked absently ahead into the darkness.

"Dis is Thornwood!" said Uncle Jimpson eagerly, pointing with his whip up a long avenue of trees; "you can't see de house 'cause dey ain't no lights in de winders. De Cunnel's paw set dem trees out de same year he bought Carline. Lord, I certainly wuz gone on dat yaller gal! But I did n't know nothin' 'bout courtin'. Carline she wuz better qualified though, an' she made me ast Old Miss ef I could n't hab her fer my wife. We did n't need no Bible nor preacher, nor sech foolishness in dem days. But when Old Miss wuz willin' we jus' dress up an' walk ober de place an' tell all de niggers we wuz married. Umph, umph! But I wuz proud

dat day! I had on a bran' new pair ob pants dat cost two-hundred an' sixty-fo' dollars in Confederate money! When Mr. Abe Lincum set us niggers free, dey made us git married all ober agin wid a preacher an' a Bible, but I never seed no diffunce."

"Does Mrs. — Mrs. Queerington ever come back to Thornwood?" asked the stranger, stumbling over the name as if it were very hard for him to say.

"Yas, sir, she comes jes' lak me an' Carline, an' wanders roun' de house an' de garden, an' sets in de ole barrel hammock, studyin' to herself."

"And Mike,— what became of him?"

Uncle Jimpson looked at him in surprise, "How 'd you know about Mike, Mister?"

"Did n't you speak of him a while ago; was n't he the dog?"

"Yas, sir. He 's our dog. He 's stayin' wif Miss Ferney Foster what libes down beyond de blacksmith's on de other side de pike. He don't lak it no better 'n we do; he 's homesick, too."

They had reached a pretentious white gateway, and Uncle Jimpson, recalled to a sense of his duties, drew himself up from his slouching posture, crooked his elbow and rounded the curve as if he had been driving a tally-ho.

Through the bare trees above them blazed the magnificent proportions of Angora Heights, with

its pretentious assembly of stables, garage and servants' quarters in the rear.

"Ye gods!" exclaimed the stranger under his breath; "is this all of it?"

"Naw, *sir!*" Uncle Jimpson denied emphatically; "if hit wuz daytime you could see de Ramparts an' de Estanade. Over dere is de Lygoon. 'Tain't nothin' shore 'nuff but our ole pond where we uster ketch bullfrogs, but Mrs. Sequin she tole me to call hit de Lygoon. You see dem carvins ober de door? Dat figger goin' up dat Egyptious stairway is John Dark. Did n't you nebber heah 'bout John Dark? He wuz a woman what fit a battle onct."

"Cut around to the side there, out of the way of the motors," directed the stranger, who seemed much more concerned in making a quiet entrance into the mansion than in studying its architectural features. "Here 's something to put in the toe of your Christmas stocking, and another for Caroline. Hurry up!"

He vaulted lightly over the wheel and turned to take his bag. As he did so the light from the conservatory window above fell full upon his upturned face.

"Fore de Lawd!" cried Uncle Jimpson, a broad grin splitting his face almost in two. "I might 'a' knowed dat de only gemman in de world what tipped lak dat wuz Mr. Don Morley!"

CHAPTER XVIII

IT is really a very difficult thing to snub Christmas. You may relegate it to the class of nuisances, and turn your back on Santa Claus, and vote the whole institution a gigantic bore, but before the day is over it usually gets the better of you, as it did of Donald Morley, arriving unannounced and unwelcomed at the side door of the Sequin mansion. It had gotten the better of him the year before when he had risen in the gray dawn of an Indian day and stoically made his way to the banks of the Ganges. It had proclaimed itself above the Vedic hymns of the twice-born Brahmins, standing knee-deep in the sacred river; it had dogged his footsteps among the ash-smeared fakirs, and jewel-hung cows; it had even haunted the burning-ghat where he had stood and watched human bodies burning on their pyres.

Eighteen months of wandering had made him sick of the casual; of the steamer acquaintances formed at one port and dropped at the next; of the unfamiliar sights and incomprehensible languages and the horde of alien yellow faces. He was weary unto death of the freedom of the high seas, and

longed fervently for a strong anchor, and a quiet harbor.

When Cropsie Decker's explosive epistle had arrived telling him of his indictment, of Margery's broken engagement, of Lee Dillingham's treachery, his first thought was not of his wrongs, but of the fact that they would necessitate his going home.

He did not stop to realize that going home meant but one thing to him. He even tried to persuade himself that seeing Miss Lady in the rôle of a happy, complaisant wife would cure him of his insatiable longing for her. From the time he heard of her marriage he had striven desperately to put her out of his mind, using every means but one to accomplish his purpose. Through all his resentment and bitterness of heart, he had never returned to his old life. Those promises made to her in the full ardor of his boyish passion, he had kept with the hopeless loyalty that one keeps the garments of the dead.

Now that he had been indicted for a crime of which he was wholly innocent, his first desire was to know if she still believed in him. To be sure, there were strong reasons why she should not: his own confession of his shortcomings; the unfortunate complication in the Dillingham affair; his subsequent disappearance. It was but natural that she should have been brought to see the folly of pinning her faith to such an unstable proposition as himself.

His first agonized protest against her marriage had given place to a stoical acceptance of the fact. He was paying the price many a man has paid for the follies of his youth, and he was ready to pay without a protest, if only she could be made to understand the truth.

All that was best in him demanded justice from her, the justice he had pleaded for in that long letter sent from San Francisco. Going home for him meant not only a trial by jury and a verdict of guilty or innocent. It meant far more. He would know from her own lips whether she had ever received his letter, and whether or not she believed in him. On her decision rested his faith in human nature and in God.

The sudden decision to return to America had been reached one night in Port Said, where he had just joined an exploring expedition bound for the Valley of the Kings. He cancelled his engagement, took passage on a little Russian steamer that was bound for Alexandria, and too impatient to wait for a liner from that port shipped on a freight boat for Naples. The passage across the Atlantic had been a tempestuous one, and he had landed in New York two days overdue, with no time to notify the family of his arrival.

And now after eighteen months of exile in foreign lands he was actually home again! That is if this

resplendent, unfamiliar abode, full of music and lights and strange servants, could be called home. However, it was the nearest approach to one he could claim, and the fact that the fatted calf had not been killed for him, and that the law waited for him around the corner, did not prevent his pulse quickening and his lips smiling as he took the side steps two at a time, and entered the rear hall.

An officious, red-headed man stood in the pantry door with a napkin over his arm, issuing peremptory orders and regulating the outcoming and ingoing waiters.

"Are you the butler?" asked Donald.

"Not yet," said the man, dropping one eyelid and assuming a confidential air; "I can see she 's after me, though. She got on to my style the minute she seen me handle a tray of glasses. 'Flathers,' she sez, 'you keep things movin' back there in the pantry, and do keep a eye on John.' John 's the butler. He 's a drinkin' man, God be praised, and I 'm layin' fer his job. Are you a chauffeur?"

"No," said Donald good humoredly. "I 'm a prodigal brother. Where have I seen you before?"

"Can't say. If a person sees me once they never fergit me. It 's me golden glow. Come, boys! Hurry up! Hurry up with them cakes there. Git them extry freezers unpacked. Git a move on yer."

"Take this card in to Mrs. Sequin," said Don-

ald, "and ask her if she can spare a moment to see a caller in the rear entry."

Phineas glanced suspiciously from the card to the stranger, then he decided that he would not question the matter.

A moment later, Mrs. Sequin with her glittering draperies gathered about her, and an expression of great perturbation on her features, made her high-heeled way through the pantry.

"Donald! My dear boy!" she exclaimed effusively, presenting her cheek with the caution of one who hopes the kiss will be light. "What on earth are you doing here? We had no idea you were in America. How thin you are! I 've been in a perfect agony about you. Not those champagne glasses, John; the larger ones. That tiresome butler! He has been tipsy all day. Now, what about yourself, Donald? It is dreadfully unwise for you to be here; you know of course of — of the indictment?"

"That 's why I 'm here. But how is everybody? How are Brother Basil and little old Margery? Where 's my saddle mare?"

"I 'll tell you everything to-morrow, Don. You must want to go to your room now. Flathers take this gentleman's bags up to the East guest-room,— no, that 's occupied. You won't mind going up another flight, just for to-night, dear?"

"Oh, tuck me in anywhere, just so there 's a bath handy."

"All the bedrooms have baths," said Mrs. Sequin absently, with her eye on the befuddled butler who was trying to uncork a bottle with a screw-driver, "Let Flathers — I mean Benson — do that, John, and you take these bags. So sorry I can't go up with you myself, Don, but the cotillion is just beginning, and I have to see to the favors."

"That 's right, don't bother about me, I 'll get into some decent togs and be down again in a little while."

Mrs. Sequin paused with her hand on the banister, then she leaned forward solicitously:

"I would n't take the trouble to dress and come down again, Don. It 's late and you must be dead tired. You go to bed. I 'll understand."

Donald, standing a few steps above her, shot a questioning glance at her, then he, too, understood.

"Oh, all right," he said, biting his lip; "I believe I won't come down. You might send Marge up, after the people leave, just to say 'Hello.'"

"Of course, we 'll both be up. Nothing could hold her if she knew you were here. But it is better that nobody should know. I was careful not to mention your name before the servants. You can have a nice little visit with us, and get away

Mrs. Sequin paused with her hand on the banister.

again without any one being the wiser. It is so lovely you got here in time for Christmas! *Good* night." She came up two steps and presented her other cheek for a kiss.

The delinquent John, meanwhile, was performing acrobatic feats with the bags, getting them so mixed up with his own legs and the stair steps that Donald snatched them from him, and, eliciting a vague direction concerning the room he was to occupy, went up to find it alone.

He felt something of the hot rebellion and resentment that he had experienced on another Christmas night in the long ago, when the cross-eyed French nurse had put him to bed at five o'clock and left him alone in the big hotel in Paris. Then he had cried himself to sleep because there was n't any Santa Claus and because he did n't have a sweetheart. But the consolations of six are denied to twenty-five.

On the second floor he followed directions and turned to the right. The dressing-rooms were deserted, the maids having taken their seats on the steps to peep at the dancers below. He, too, paused, and looked down at the gaily whirling throng. There was his old familiar world, the fellows he had been through college with, the girls he had flirted with, the very music he had danced to, times without numbers. And he was as much out of it

all as if he had died of the fever in that gray old hospital in Singapore! Ah, if he only had!

He turned abruptly and started up the second flight of stairs, and as he did so something rose precipitately from the steps, and fluttered ahead of him.

He looked up and as he did so chaos broke loose within him. There at the top, in the subdued light from the upper hall, startled, uncertain, off her guard, stood Miss Lady, not the pretty, harum-scarum girl of his dreams, but a beautiful, wistful woman, with trembling lips and startled eyes, who held out her hands to him in involuntary welcome.

He lost his head completely. All the blood in his body rushed to his throat. Something sang through every fiber of him.

"Miss Lady!" he cried, catching the hands she extended in both of his, then as she drew back from his too ardent look, he remembered. "I beg your pardon, of course it 's Mrs. Queerington, now."

"Not to you, Don. When did you come? Are you well again? Did n't any one know you were coming? Have the others seen you?"

She poured forth her questions eagerly, as if she feared another pause. She was making a desperate effort to appear easy, but her eagerness betrayed her. She repeated that she had no idea he was in America, and took refuge in a general assurance that

everybody would be so glad to have him home again.

Donald, lean and tanned, stood silent, watching her searchingly. His deep-set eyes were clearer and steadier than of old, but they were no longer the eyes of a boy. He was like a mariner whose ship has been wrecked. He had nothing worse to dread and nothing to hope for. He simply desired to see the rock on which his life craft had smashed.

Miss Lady continued to ask questions, but she evidently did not always heed the answers as she asked some of them twice over. It was not until Donald's trouble was touched upon that her mood steadied and she lost her self-consciousness.

"Of course you must stand the trial," she said, and her voice rang with the old assurance; "you must fight the whole matter out once for all, and prove your innocence."

"Oh, the Court will prove that all right, but what does it matter? If people were willing to damn me without hearing, to believe that I had shot a man's eye out, then run away to escape the punishment — Bah! it 's sickening."

"But everybody does n't believe it. The Doctor does n't, nor Margery, nor Cropsie Decker, nor I. Hundreds of your friends are ready to stand by you. Don't listen to what anybody else says, but stay and fight it out."

He looked up suddenly. "Did you ever get that letter I wrote you before I sailed from 'Frisco?"

He had n't meant to blurt it out like that, the question that had tortured him so long, but her sympathy and friendliness had unnerved him.

Leaning forward with all his soul in his eyes, he watched the color mount steadily from her throat to her cheeks, then to her brow. He heard her draw a sharp, quivering breath as one who walks on a precipice, then she faced him steadily.

"Yes, Donald," she said, meeting his gaze unflinchingly, "I got it."

He dropped his head on his hand where it rested on the banister, and they stood for a moment in silence save for the strains of music that came up from below. Then he straightened his shoulders.

"That 's all. I had to make sure, you know. And you did n't believe in me?"

Across her face quivered the desire for speech, and the necessity for silence.

"I do believe in you, Don," she said earnestly. "I believe in you with all my heart and soul. And we are going to be your friends; you 'll let us, the Doctor and me?"

He took the hand she offered, but he said nothing, and after she was gone he went into his room, and flinging himself across the bed, buried his face in the pillows.

CHAPTER XIX

THE new year began inauspiciously at the Queerington's. In the first place Bertie woke up with the chickenpox and was banished to the nursery. Then the Doctor followed his annual custom of going over his business affairs, with the usual result that he found his accounts greatly overdrawn. This fact was solemnly communicated to each member of the family in turn together with admonitions in regard to the future. By lunch time Hattie had been sent to her room for impertinently suggesting that her father spent more on his books than she did on her clothes, and Connie was sulking over a reduced allowance.

"Of course," the Doctor explained to Miss Lady as he sank exhausted into his invalid chair which had been pressed into service again during the past few weeks, "I have no doubt but that Basil Sequin can arrange things for me. He always has in the past, but he seems very pressed of late, very harassed. I hardly like to approach him so soon again for a loan."

"Could n't we rent a smaller house, and have less company?" suggested Miss Lady.

The Doctor shook his head. "It would be very difficult for me to adjust myself to new surroundings. The conditions here for my work are fairly satisfactory. The Ivy's piano, to be sure, is a constant annoyance, but by using cotton in my ears I obviate that nuisance. It is particularly unfortunate that this complication about money should come just at the most critical point of my work. Unless Basil Sequin can make some arrangement, I shall be seriously embarrassed."

"I 'll tell you what we can do," cried Miss Lady brightly, just as if she had not been trying to get herself up to the point of making the offer for a week. "We can sell off another bit of Thornwood. Since the Sequins built out there ever so many people have asked about ground."

"No," said the Doctor, the lines of care deepening in his fine, grave face. "There is little left now but the house and farm. Your sentiment regarding the place is such that I cannot permit the sacrifice. The matter will doubtless adjust itself. I shall take some private pupils at the university and perhaps arrange an extra course of lectures. The exigencies of the past two years have been exceptional."

"But you are already working yourself to death,"

protested Miss Lady. "Doctor Wyeth said last week that you could not stand the strain. The rest of us ought to do something; we *must* do something!"

"You are doing something, my dear. You are relieving me of innumerable burdens in regard to the house and the children. You are proving of great assistance to me in my work, not only by your reading aloud, but by the unfailing sympathy and understanding you give me. Whatever success shall crown my life work will be in a measure due to you."

She was sitting on a hassock at his feet, and she looked up at him with strange, dumb eyes. His frail body and towering ambition, his loveless life that knew not what it missed, roused in her a pity almost maternal. A fierce resentment rose within her against herself, for not loving him as she knew a husband should be loved. If he had only won her with his heart instead of his head!

The door bell rang and Miss Lady glanced up apprehensively.

"It was the pickle woman," announced Myrtella, coming in a moment later from the hall. "I sent her about her business."

"Not Miss Ferney!" cried Miss Lady, springing up and rushing out to call her.

Miss Ferney Foster with much difficulty was per-

suaded to return and sit on the edge of a hall chair. On New Year's in the past she had always made a formal call at Thornwood and presented the Colonel with a sample of her best wares. The Colonel in turn had invariably sent down cellar for one of the cobwebbiest bottles on the swinging shelf and bestowed it upon her with great gallantry. The indignity of having been refused admittance at the house of the Colonel's daughter was almost more than she could bear.

"Now, tell me about everybody out home," demanded Miss Lady eagerly. "Begin at the bottom of the hill and go right straight up."

"I don't know much news," Miss Ferney said, plucking at the fingers of her cotton gloves. "I been sewing up to the Sequins' all week."

"Mercy! How grand we are getting!"

"Just hemming tableclothes and napkins. I can't say I think much of their new place. It 's kind of skimpy."

"Why, Miss Ferney! It is the biggest house I was even in!"

"I ain't talking 'bout the size. I 'm talking 'bout the fixings. There ain't a single carpet that fits the floor by two feet, and the wallpaper 's patched in every room but one. As for the dining-room! Well, I would n't have believed it if I had n't seen it with my own eyes! They have n't got a picture,

or a tidy, or a curtain, or a lamberkin, of any kind. 'Spose I ought n't to tell it on 'em, but the day I was there they did n't even have a tablecloth!"

Miss Lady laughed in spite of herself, and Bertie heard her and got out of bed to call over the banisters that if they were telling jokes to please come up there.

"You know that young man that used to be out to the Wickers'?" asked Miss Ferney on the way up. "Well, he 's Mrs. Sequin's brother. He 's giving 'em considerable trouble."

"How do you mean?"

"They want him to go 'way somewheres, and he won't do it. The servant girl told me that him and his sister had been having it up and down, and that Miss Margery took his side."

"Is he going to stay?" Miss Lady paused and her fingers gripped the banister.

"I dunno. I guess if he gits mad enough he 'll run off to China like he did before. Ain't that somebody calling you?"

It was Connie who had run up to say that a young man was at the front door who looked like a tombstone with a blond pompadour.

"Noah Wicker!" exclaimed Miss Lady. "I forgot that I told him I would try to get him into Mr. Gooch's law office the first of the year. Was n't it like him to arrive the first day? You go down,

Connie, that 's a darling, and entertain him 'til I come. I 'll be there directly."

But "directly" proved an elastic term, for after Miss Ferney had left, and four different persons had been assured over the telephone that all invitations were being declined on account of the Doctor's indisposition, Miss Lady found Hattie still sulking in her room, and spent a half hour in restoring peace to that troubled bosom.

Meanwhile Myrtella came up to announce with elation that a waterpipe had burst in the cellar. Few things roused such joy in Myrtella as the bursting of a waterpipe. It was an act of insubordination on the part of the pipe, with which she deeply sympathized.

"And it 's Mr. Gooch's night for supper, and if that man in the parlor stays, too, the ice cream won't go 'round," she declared, with evident satisfaction in the cumulative tragedy.

By the time the knots were untied, Miss Lady had forgotten all about Noah Wicker, and it was only when Connie came in declaring indignantly that she would n't talk to the stupid fellow another minute, that she remembered.

"You poor dear child!" she cried, giving her a repentant squeeze. "I am sorry. Hattie, would you mind going down and entertaining him a second, 'til I change my dress?"

"I would," said Hattie firmly.

Of course Noah stayed to dinner, and Miss Lady regarded it as an act of Providence that he and Mr. Gooch should have thus immediately been thrown together.

But when Mr. Gooch arrived he was concerned with much more important affairs. He brought the astounding news that Donald Morley had returned home and, against the advice of his family and his lawyers, decided to stand his trial for the shooting of Dick Sheeley!

"It is perfectly preposterous!" Mr. Gooch exploded, "to voluntarily put himself in the clutches of the law in a complicated case like this! He could have lived elsewhere for a few years. Even if he is innocent, the evidence is all against him. I have argued with him for two days. His sister tells me that she has worked on him for a week. He will listen to nobody."

"Quite right," said the Doctor emphatically. "The establishment of his good name should be his primary consideration. 'The purest treasure mortal times afford is spotless reputation.' I am more gratified than I can say that Donald is taking this course. He is justifying my persistent belief in his integrity. Once cleared by a jury the ghost of that unfortunate affair will, I trust, be laid forever."

"It is not so certain that he will be cleared," Mr.

Gooch said, taking his accustomed seat at the table, with a solicitous eye on the door where Myrtella would appear with the soup. "I shall do my best for him, but I have my doubts."

"You say he has been here a week?" the Doctor asked. "Strange he has not been in to see us. He was always fond of the children, and professed a certain regard, I believe, for me. I want him to meet Mrs. Queerington."

There was a pause, during which Noah Wicker turned a surprised glance upon the hostess.

"I know Mr. Morley," she said steadily, while the color mounted to her cheeks. "I knew him when he was with Noah at the farm."

"Indeed," said the Doctor. "I must have forgotten your mentioning it. I am afraid, Mr. Wicker, we 've been neglecting you to-night in our concern over Donald's problems. But it is a subject in which you are doubtless equally interested?"

Noah started to reply, but realizing that the company was looking at him, forgot what he was going to say and bowed instead.

At this juncture the thing of all others that Miss Lady dreaded, occurred. Donald Morley was announced by Myrtella in tones whose accents implied that nothing could now prevent the ice cream from giving out.

"Well, well!" cried the Doctor, rising and greet-

ing him with outstretched hand, "a hearty welcome home. You know everybody here, I believe? Even Mrs. Queerington tells me she has met you. And this is Hattie. I am quite sure you were not prepared to see her so tall."

Donald, retaining Hattie's hand, made the round of greetings.

"Where are Connie and Bert?"

"Connie is dressing for a party, and poor old Bert is struggling with the chickenpox," Miss Lady managed to say as she busied herself with the coffee cups.

"And now tell us about yourself," said the Doctor, drawing a chair for Donald beside his own. "You will pardon my cushions, but I am still something of an invalid, and the little lady at the end of the table insists upon spoiling me. You knew, of course, of my accident, some two years ago?"

"Not until I got home," Donald said without looking up. "I hope you've gotten well again?"

"Oh, no, I shall never be well. The physicians assured me of that from the first, but they also said that with care and proper conservation of my energies I would probably live to a ripe old age. I do not suppose you have ever had to resist the temptation to overwork, Donald?"

Donald smiled and puckered his brow.

"He has plenty of work cut out for him now!" growled Mr. Gooch, whose mind having been temporarily diverted by the salad now rushed back to the trial.

"Work for an admirable cause," said the Doctor. "Mr. Gooch has just been telling us of your decision, Donald, and I cannot express my gratification at your course of action."

"Thank you, Doctor! That's the first encouragement I've had. My family seem to think I am a lunatic, and even my lawyer, here, is taking the case under protest."

"The value of a good name," began the Doctor, then remembering that he had delivered himself at length on that subject earlier in the evening, he broke off by inquiring if Donald had been doing any writing during his absence.

"Oh! yes, I am always scribbling. It doesn't amount to anything though."

"Yes, it does, too!" declared Hattie, to whom Cousin Don had always been a hero. "Mr. Decker told Gerald Ivy that you did all the best things in the articles he sent home for the syndicate."

"I suspected it!" said the Doctor. "I thought I recognized your humorous view-point in that first article on China. I remarked to my wife at the time that you had visualized the scene, for the reader, exactly as you had seen it."

"But I didn't!" said Donald. "I wrote that story a month before we reached China. Decker hit on the idea of getting all the articles written while we were crossing the Pacific, so we wouldn't have to bother about them after we landed. We used to get up on the boat-deck and turn them off like hot cakes. That's all foolishness about my doing the best parts. Why, Decker is a wonder! He's reducing the thing to a science; he doesn't even need a pen or a pencil; just plenty of guide books, a paper of pins, and a pair of scissors. Lapboard literature, he calls it. He spent most of his time trimming my effusions down to measurements."

"That is because you indulged your imagination. It is a drug in the journalistic market, but it is invaluable elsewhere. Why not try something for the magazines? Choose a congenial theme and give your fancy full rein. It will be interesting to see what comes of it."

Connie's entrance here interrupted further conversation. She had neglected no detail of her toilet, and the result was a pink and white confection ready for conquest.

"We thought you were never coming to see us, Cousin Don," she said, half pouting, and giving a side glance at Noah Wicker. "You've been home a whole week!"

"Heavens, Connie! I didn't expect to find you so grown up. How long have you been out?"

"I've never been in," she said, releasing her hand and smiling consciously. "Aren't you coming to the Bartrums' party to-night?"

"No, I'm not in a mood for parties these days."

"But I've never had a chance to dance with you since you taught me to waltz."

"Horrible deprivation! Can you still do the cake walk I taught you?"

"Yes, and so can Miss Lady! Isn't it funny? She says it's the one the darkeys dance at the picnics up at Thornwood! Come on, Miss Lady; let's show them!"

"Constance, Constance!" remonstrated the Doctor gently, as the girl seized Miss Lady's hands and tried to draw her to her feet. "You see, Donald, the children forget that Mrs. Queerington is anything but a play-fellow, and sometimes —" he rose and laid a hand on her shoulder, "sometimes she forgets, too."

Donald pushed back his chair abruptly.

"I think I'll come to the party, Connie, after all. I'll run up to Decker's room at the hotel and change my togs. You will save me a waltz or two?"

"All of them, if you like! It's going to be the jolliest dance of the season, everybody says so.

Change your mind, Miss Lady, and come! I don't see how you can hesitate when you remember the time you had at the Sequins'! Gerald is coming for me; we can all go down together."

Miss Lady needed only the spark of Connie's enthusiasm to start all the forbidden fires in her. Her eyes flew to the Doctor's face.

He smiled as he caught her eager look. "Go with them, my dear, if you like. It is quite a natural instinct, I believe, to celebrate the first night of the New Year."

"But you, will you take me? Just this once, Doctor?"

"No, no. My party days are over. Donald here will take my place, will you not, Donald?"

But Miss Lady gave him no chance to answer. That mad insistent clamor within her for joy, for life, for love, could not be trusted for a moment. She was afraid of herself!

"I 'll stay home," she said, with a brave attempt at gaiety, conscious of Donald's critical eyes upon her. "We will have a pinochle tournament, and Noah and I will beat the home team on its own ground. Won't we, Noah?"

But Noah did not hear her; he was absorbed in watching Connie who stood on tiptoe, pinning a flower in Don Morley's buttonhole.

CHAPTER XX

FOR the next month little else was talked about but Donald Morley's trial. The truth of the matter sustained a compound fracture every time the subject was discussed. In some quarters it was confidently asserted that the fugitive from justice had been captured the moment he landed in America, and was allowed his liberty only under a heavy bond. Others contended that a guilty conscience had driven him to confession.

Meanwhile his friends were either exasperated at his folly in reviving the old scandal, or quixotically enthusiastic over his demand for justice. Mrs. Sequin bitterly opposed his action until she found that the Bartrums, Dr. Queerington, and other influential friends upheld him, then she decided to suspend her judgment until the trial was over. Of course if he was going to be a hero, she wanted to be his loving sister, but if he was going to be convicted, she would have nothing more to do with him. He had gone directly against her advice in coming home, and she observed with ominous certainty that "he would see."

Donald threw himself into the work before him with grim determination. He spent hours daily in Mr. Gooch's stuffy office going over transcript of testimony in the Dillingham trial; he made a number of visits to Billy-goat Hill, recalling every detail of the shooting. On the first visit he had sought out Sheeley, confident of being able to jog his memory concerning his part in the affray, but to his dismay he found that Sheeley had already been summoned to the office of the prosecuting attorney. In every direction he turned he encountered the octopus of the law.

Mr. Gooch gave him little encouragement. He wheezed, and whined, and contested every suggestion. His client appeared to him a foolhardy boy who had gotten well out of an ugly scrape, and did not have sense enough to stay out. So strongly did he feel this that he felt called upon to express it at great length, on every possible occasion.

Donald would sit before him with arms folded, and jaws set, waiting impatiently for these harangues to cease. He had employed him because he was the family lawyer, and because he was a friend of Doctor Queerington's. At the end of the first week he realized that he had made a mistake, and confided the fact to Noah Wicker.

Noah, having successfully worked through the law course at the university, was now, by the persistent

efforts of Miss Lady, occupying a dark corner of Mr. Gooch's outer office. Here, with feet hooked under a rung of a stool, and fingers grasping his pompadour, he doggedly wrestled with the cases he heard in court, laboriously puzzling out obscure points by the aid of the Statute and the Code.

Donald soon fell into the habit of discussing his approaching trial with him, at such times as Mr. Gooch was absent. He found Noah's calm, impersonal point of view a relief after the skeptical, disapproving attitude of the older attorney.

During these days Donald spent as little time as possible at Angora Heights. The family skeletons that had always lurked in the Sequin closets, seemed to revel in their commodious new quarters. It is a melancholy fact that the more closets one acquires, the more skeletons there are to occupy them!

Mrs. Sequin's existence, if restless in town, was trebly so in the country. Between catching trains and receiving and speeding guests, engaging and dismissing servants, and agonizing over the non-essentials, she dwelt in the vortex of a whirlwind that disturbed everything in its wake.

Between her and Margery the gulf was widening. Having declared her independence, the girl went further, and entered a training class in the kindergarten, an act which caused a rupture that threatened to be serious, until the head of the family for

once asserted his authority, and unexpectedly sided with his daughter.

Basil Sequin during these days had little time to bestow upon family matters. He rose at six o'clock, drank three cups of black coffee, devoured the newspapers, and was on the way to the office before his gardener was out of bed. Before and after banking hours he had committee meetings, and special appointments, snatching a few minutes for luncheon at the nearest restaurant.

Donald had had but one chance to talk with him since his return, and that was one evening when he was summoned to his den. He found him pacing restlessly up and down the room, his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"You 've decided to stand the trial, I hear?" Mr. Sequin asked abruptly.

"Yes, I had to get the matter cleared up. It is all so idiotic, my being indicted! I don't anticipate any trouble."

"You can't tell," said Mr. Sequin, "but I did n't send for you to discuss the trial. It 's business I want to talk about. Do you know how much stock you own in the People's Bank?"

"No, I can't say that I do exactly."

"Well, it 's time you were finding out. How would you like to take charge of your own affairs from now on?"

Donald looked at him in undisguised surprise. Heretofore the only time that money matters had been discussed between them was when he had been guilty of some extra extravagance. This sudden change of tactics on the part of his brother-in-law was disconcerting.

"Why, I should n't like it at all, unless it would relieve you," he said.

"It is n't that. One bother more or less does n't matter. The point is, I want you to act for yourself. The result of this trial is by no means certain; you may need considerable ready money before you get through with it. Why don't you sell your bank stock, and make some better paying investments on your own hook?"

"Why, I thought the bank stock —" began Donald, but Mr. Sequin wheeled upon him impatiently.

"Do you want my advice or not?"

"Of course I want it."

"Very well. Listen to me. Almost every dollar you have is tied up in the People's Bank. Go down to-morrow morning to a broker, Gilson 's the best man, tell him that you must have a big sum of money at once. In order to get it you are willing to sacrifice every share of your People's stock. Tell him not to put it on the market, but to sell it in small blocks to different people, and not to stick at the price. Make him understand that it has to do with

your trial, and caution him particularly not to let me know of the transaction."

"But I don't understand," said Donald, watching with troubled eyes the stooped figure that continued to pace up and down the room like an animal in a cage.

"I did n't offer to explain. I offered to advise," Mr. Sequin snarled. "There are complications that could n't be made clear to you in a month! I 'll ask you not to refer to this matter again to me or to any one else. I have a lot of papers to look over now, so I 'll say good night."

Donald rose from where he had been sitting at the table.

"Of course you know what is best," he said irresolutely. "And I know I 've got no business shifting my responsibilities on you. By the way, can't I help you with some of this stuff? You look about done for to-night."

"Done for?" Mr. Sequin smiled ironically, and ran his fingers through his scant gray hair. "Why, Don, I 'd change places with any old corpse to-night, just for a chance to lie down in a quiet corner and stop thinking! No, there 's nothing you can do. There 's nothing anybody can do. Good night; close the door as you go out, and leave word downstairs if I am called over the 'phone to say I am not here."

All things considered it is small wonder that Donald passed as little time as possible at Angora Heights. The time he was not occupied with his trial hung heavy on his hands. Distrustful of his friends, sensitive to criticism, and dreading the humiliating ordeal to come, he spent one of the most wretched months of his life. He tried to write, but fancy fled before the glare of the actual. The only place where he found temporary peace was under the roof of the grim-looking house in College Street.

From the first Doctor Queerington had championed his cause, and urged upon him his hospitality. To be sure the Doctor's hospitality usually began and ended with his welcome, after which he would take himself off to the study, and leave his guest to the care of the family.

At such times Miss Lady invariably went with him. In fact, Donald had never seen her alone since the night of his arrival, and the very fact that she seldom remained down-stairs in the evenings, made his conscience lighter about lingering in her vicinity.

Mrs. Ivy was the first to comment on his frequent visits. She confided to Mrs. Sequin that she was afraid he was getting interested in Connie Queerington, and that somebody ought to tell him that Connie had been in love with dear Gerald for years and

years. An impartial observer might have expressed a less confident opinion concerning the object of Miss Connie's affections.

Noah Wicker, for instance, while not exactly an impartial observer, had arrived at quite a different conclusion.

"You watch the way she looks at Don," he said darkly to Miss Lady on one occasion.

Miss Lady laughed, "Oh! Connie's like the Last Duchess, she likes whate'er she looks on, and her looks go everywhere."

"Yes, but this is different. Has she ever said anything to you about him?"

"Mercy, yes, Connie talks to be about all the boys."

"Does she talk about me?" Noah's eyes were as wistful as a dog's.

For a second Miss Lady hesitated, then she compromised with truth and said, "yes." She did not add that Connie was particularly voluble on the subject of his hair, and the creak of his boots and his apparent genius for ubiquity.

"Do you know what I'd do if I were you, Noah?" she said. "I'd have me a new suit of clothes made."

"Why, these are new!"

"Yes, I know, but they don't fit. And get some shoes that don't creak, and — and you won't mind

my telling you, Noah? Pompadours went out of style six years ago."

Noah gloomily shook his head. "It 's not my clothes. It 's not clothes that make Don Morley. By the way, are n't you two friends, any more?"

Miss Lady faced the question unflinchingly. "Yes, we are friends. Is he going to win out?"

"With Miss Connie?"

"No, you foolish boy. In his trial."

"I don't know."

"What will happen if he loses?"

"The case will be appealed."

"And if he loses in the Court of Appeals?"

"It 's up to Gooch to see that he does n't lose. I only wish I was as certain of a few other things as I am of Donald Morley's innocence!"

One afternoon, a few days before the trial, Donald after oscillating between the hotel and his club and finding each equally intolerable, jumped on the car and went out to the Queeringtons. It was a cold, raw day, with a fine mist filling the air, and even the dull formality of the drab parlor seemed a relief from the gloom without.

Miss Lady started up from the piano as he entered, but Connie pulled her back:

"You shan't run off and leave us, shall she, Cousin Don? She was just going to play for Mr. Wicker to sing. Did you know he could sing?"

"Oh, yes. Wick's the Original Warbler. Do you remember our serenades on the Cane Run Road, Wick?"

"Yes," said Noah glumly.

"I forgot that you and Mr. Wicker used to know each other," Connie said curiously. "Why the Cane Run Road runs by Thornwood, does n't it?"

"Yes," said Don calmly, seizing the conversation and shoving it out of shoal water. "Go ahead, Wick, and sing something; we 'll join in the chorus."

But when the time for the chorus came Donald had forgotten his promise. He was leaning back in a corner of the sofa, his hand shading his eyes, watching Miss Lady, and wondering what trick of fate had driven her to marry John Jay Queerington. There was no man in the world whose moral worth he admired more, but Miss Lady seemed as out of place in his life as a darting, quivering humming-bird in a museum of natural history. He noticed the faint shadows about her eyes, and the wistful droop of her lips. If he could only set her free! A mad desire seized him to see her once more joyously on the wing with all her old buoyancy and daring. And yet she had walked open eyed into her cage, and he had yet to see the tiniest flutter of her wings against the bars.

On that first night of his home-coming surely he had read a welcome in her eyes! But never since

by word or gesture had he reason to think that she remembered. She was gracious and elusive, and she talked to him as she talked to Decker and Gerald Ivy, only she looked at them when she talked, and she never even looked at him.

Yet she *had* cared! He had only to recall the flashing revelation of her eyes that night in the garden to know for one transcendent moment, at least, she was his. It was the look that had sustained his faith in her through all those weary months of silence, making him cling to the belief, until he heard the truth from her own lips, that she had failed to get his letter. It was the remembrance of that look and what it had promised that rushed upon him now as he watched her.

All the reckless impulse of his boyhood, the long years of unrestraint, surged over him, urging him on to wake in her some answer to his fierce, insistent demand. She should remember the way he had loved her, she should know the way he loved her now. If there was any heart left in her she must respond in some way to his imperative need.

But her eyes kept steadily on the key-board, and her fingers unfalteringly followed the notes. Could he have known how the tears burned under her lashes, and how cold her fingers were on the keys; could he have guessed how she sat there under his steady gaze, with tense muscles and quivering

nerves, calculating the minutes that must elapse before Noah's interminable verses would end, and she could escape, he might have had compassion on her.

"Sing, Cousin Don!" demanded Connie; "you are leaving it all to Mr. Wicker and me, while you sit there looking exactly as if you had lost your last friend."

"No, only my illusions, Connie."

"Where did you lose them?"

"In Singapore. All but one. I hung on to it clear around the world, only to lose it on Christmas night when I got home. Don't you feel sorry for me?"

"Not a bit," said Connie saucily. "I could n't feel sorry for anybody as good looking as you are,—could you, Mr. Wicker? Where did Miss Lady go?"

"She said she was going to lie down, that her head ached," said Noah.

"I know what 's the matter," said Connie; "she tries to keep us from seeing it, but she 's all broken up over selling Thornwood."

"Thornwood!" cried Donald; "she has n't sold it?"

"No, but it 's been put up for sale. She 'd die at the stake for Father. He does n't even know about it."

"But surely there is some other way."

Connie shrugged her shoulders. "I am sure I don't know. Hattie 's given up music and French, and we 've put Bertie in the public school, and I have n't had but one party dress this winter. But a girl does n't have to depend on clothes to have a good time, does she, Mr. Wicker?"

That night Donald sat up late, turning things over in his mind. Once the trial was over he must go away, where he could not see Miss Lady or hear of her. He must plunge into some business that would absorb his time and attention. But before he went he must make an investment and make it at once. In order to do so, he would follow Basil Sequin's advice, and offer his bank stock for sale in the morning.

CHAPTER XXI

THERE was anxiety in the drab house in College Street. The second day of Donald Morley's trial had come and no decision had been reached. Every ring of the telephone, every opening of the front door brought a hurrying of feet through the hall, and an eager demand to know if there was any news.

"I 'll never get my lessons!" exclaimed Hattie petulantly, collecting her scattered belongings after one of these rushes to the door. "I wish to Heaven one of my fingers was a lead pencil!"

"Why don't you wish your tongue was one, Hat, then you would n't have to sharpen it," suggested Connie.

"I bet Miss Lady had my pencil," went on Hattie, ignoring Connie's comment. "She 's never owned a pair of scissors, or a pencil, or a shoe-buttoner since she 's been here. And look at those letters on the mantel! She 'll never think about mailing them."

"What are they doing with black borders?"

"She bought a job lot of paper the other day,

all colors and sizes, trying to be economical. She uses the mourning ones to pay the bills."

"Yes, and I 'll have to be putting little pink love letters in big blue envelopes all winter. Say, Hat, do you suppose it would be all right if I called up Mr. Wicker to ask him how the trial is going?"

"Of course not. We 'll hear as soon as there is anything to hear. I wish you 'd hush talking and let me study."

Connie heroically refrained from speech for five minutes, then she announced:

"Do you know, I don't believe Miss Lady likes him!"

"Who? Mr. Wicker?"

"No, you silly,— Don."

"When did you stop saying Cousin Don, pray?"

"Oh, ages ago. She 's always so quiet when he comes, and she goes up-stairs the first chance she gets. I think she 's changed a lot since she first came, don't you?"

"Well, I guess you 'd change, too, if you had married a sick man with three children, as poor as poverty, and a cook as cross as Myrtella."

"But she has Myrtella eating out of her hand. Imagine my marrying a man as old as Father!"

"If I had to marry, I 'd rather marry Father than anybody else. But I 've never seen the man yet that I 'd be willing to marry."

"Oh, I have! I know ten right now that I'd marry in a minute."

"Connie Queerington! Who are the others beside Gerald and Cousin Don?"

"Guess."

"Noah Wicker?"

Connie laughed. "Mr. Wicker is not as bad as he was. He must have taken chloroform and had his pompadour cut. Don says he is awfully clever."

"Anybody could be clever who took a whole day to compose each speech. I'll tell you what's the matter with Miss Lady; she is worrying herself sick over Father. Did she tell you what Doctor Wyeth told her?"

"That Father would have to give up his classes, and get away some where? But of course he can't do it."

"But he can! Miss Lady has rented Thornwood from the man who bought it, and we are all to go out there this spring."

"Heavens! That means frogs and crickets and whippoorwills, and a lonesome time for me."

"But think of Father!" said Hattie with her most virtuous air. "If it's perfectly quiet, perhaps he can finish his book."

"No, he won't," said Connie petulantly. "He may finish himself, but he'll never finish that book; he keeps on thinking of more to say, just like Mr.

Melcher does when he prays. If it were n't for that stupid old book he might get well. Was that the telephone?"

It proved to be the side-door bell, which was rung by an old woman who had lost her husband and her front teeth, and was engaged in the precarious occupation of selling shoe-strings. She was one of the numerous protégés, who began to call on Miss Lady soon after breakfast, and kept up their visits through the day, to the exasperation of Myrtella Flathers, who spent her time devising means to rid the back hall of these incumbrances.

In this instance strategy was not required, for she was bidden to send the woman away. Such an unusual proceeding aroused her curiosity and she returned to the dining-room to peep through the door at her young mistress, who had been sitting motionless since breakfast with her elbows on the table, and her hands locked under her chin. It was evident that something was wrong, and Myrtella became so concerned that she at last decided to take action. The panacea she applied to all ailments, moral or physical, was a counter-irritant.

"Mis' Squeerington!" she ventured finally. "I hope you ain't fergot that it 's Saturday mornin' an' you 'd orter row the grocery man. He 's a cortion, that 's what he is, a-sendin' us Mis' Ivy's ribs, an' Mis' Logan's liver. It ain't a decent way

to treat a old customer, an' he orter be told so. There never was a grocery man that was born into the world that did n't have to be rowed! They expect it, they look fer it, an' when they don't get it they feel it."

"I can't 'row' people, Myrtella; I don't know how," said Miss Lady listlessly.

"I 'll learn you. You 've picked up a lot more already than anybody would 'a' supposed you would when you first come. But one thing you ain't learned. When a lady goes to smilin' over the telephone, an' tellin' the butcher that she don't know one cut from another but she 'll trust him to send her a nice piece, you kin count on it she 's goin' to git a gristle. Compliments an' smiles may git some things, but it takes rowin' an' back-talk to git a good beefsteak!"

"I think I 'll send you to the grocery to-day, Myrtella,— it — it may rain."

"It ain't goin' to rain before noon," Myrtella said authoritatively, in a tone that indicated her intention of stopping it immediately if it showed any intention of doing so. "It 'll do you good to git out and walk a spell."

Miss Lady shook her head.

"Well, then you better let me send Bertie down here, he 's makin' a awful racket in the nursery an' his pa 'll be after him soon."

Bertie was induced to abandon a life of adventure on the footboard of his bed, by the suggestion that Miss Lady had something to tell him in the dining-room. He came tearing through the hall shouting, "Extras," at the top of his voice.

"Bertie, darling! Please don't," cried Miss Lady roused from her apathy. "Remember it 's Saturday and Father 's home."

"I wish he was n't," said Bertie. "I hate a tip-toe house! When can I call extras?"

"When we get up to Thornwood. You and I will play all over the hills, and I 'll teach you to be a real country boy."

"And can Chick be there, too?"

"Yes, and perhaps by that time Chick will have been to the hospital and can talk like other boys."

Bertie was standing on the back of her chair by this time, apparently trying to strangle her.

"And can we slide down the ice-house like you used to do? And will Uncle Jimpson call up the doodle-bugs out of the ground like he did when you was a little girl?"

"Listen!" cried Miss Lady suddenly starting up. "What is that?"

From the far end of the street came the sound, "Wuxtry! Here 's your Wuxtry! All about —"

"It 's just the newsboy I was being like," said

Bertie. "What's the matter? What makes you shake so, Miss Lady?"

Myrtella thrust her head in the door. "Here comes that there Mrs. Ivy running 'cross the yard. She's good fer a hour."

But Mrs. Ivy did not seem to be good for anything by the time Miss Lady reached her. She was half reclining on a haircloth sofa in the front hall with a bottle of smelling salts to her nose and a newspaper in her hand.

"Oh, my *dear!*" she managed to gasp. "Such a frightful shock! So utterly unexpected!"

"Do you mean Don?" Miss Lady's lips scarcely moved as she asked the question.

"No, the bank! I was all alone in the house when I heard the boys calling the extras — Ah! my poor weak heart!"

"Brandy?" suggested Miss Lady anxiously.

Mrs. Ivy raised feeble but protesting eyes: "Never! The Angel of Death shall never find me with the odor of liquor on my lips. Could you send for some nitroglycerin?"

By the time Mrs. Ivy was revived, Connie and Hattie had joined the group in the hall, and the latter was reading aloud in awe-struck tones the account of the People's Bank failure. The age and reputation of the institution and the prominence of

Basil Sequin as a local financier gave the subject grave significance.

"And to think that I should be involved!" wailed Mrs. Ivy. "I've only been treasurer of the W. A. Board for six weeks and this was my first investment! They told me to use my judgment, and I did the best I could! Only last Thursday I went to see Mr. Gilson the broker, you know, about investing the money we're collecting for building the Parish House. He said I had come at the right moment as he had just gotten hold of some of the People's Bank stock, 'gilt edged,' he called it, and I remember just what I said to him, I said, 'Mr. Gilson, I simply let Providence lead me, and it led me to your door!' and I bought it!" sobbed Mrs. Ivy; "forty shares!"

"I suppose Father's lost awfully," said Hattie, sitting round eyed and anxious on the steps.

"And all the Sequins, and Don," added Connie.

"It says that all the stockholders and most of the depositors stand to lose heavily," said Miss Lady, scanning the paper; "I must tell the Doctor at once."

She sped up the steps and knocked breathlessly at his study door. It was only at the second knock that she was bidden to enter.

The Doctor sat at his desk in a long, gray dressing-gown, with a rug across his knees: around him

were ranged several straight-backed chairs on which were spread hundreds of pages of closely written manuscript. At his elbow on a stand was an immense dictionary, from which he lifted a pair of absorbed and preoccupied eyes.

"Doctor!" Miss Lady burst out impetuously, "the Bank has failed — the paper says —"

"If you please!" the Doctor raised an imploring hand; "don't tell me now. The news will keep and I am in a most critical stage of my summary. To-day's work is important, very important. Kindly close the door."

Miss Lady stood in the hall without and stared at the drab-colored wallpaper. A fierce anger rose in her, not against the Doctor, but against that vampire work which was sucking all the vitality and sympathy and understanding out of him. She was eager to bear his burdens; she was willing to fight his battles; but it was hard to take his side single-handed against herself. She wanted love, and affection and sympathy, and she wanted a manly shoulder to weep on when the way became too hard. But the Doctor's slanting, scholarly shoulder afforded no resting-place for a world-weary head.

"Mis' Squeerington!" called Myrtella from the lower floor. "The grocery man did n't have no beets, and his new potatoes is hard as rocks, an' if I was you I 'd go over to Smithers jes' to spite him

out fer a spell. And I fergot to tell you that that there Mr. Wicker called you up a hour ago, an' sez the case was lost. I don't know what he meant. I hope he ain't lost it 'round here. Next thing I hear they 'll be sayin' I took it!"

CHAPTER XXII

IT is a depressing law of life that worries invariably hunt in packs. If it were just a matter of one yelping little annoyance that barked at your heels, you could frighten it away with a laugh; but when a ravenous horde gets on your trail with the grim determination of running you to earth, it is quite a different matter.

Donald Morley, pacing the terrace at Angora Heights on a certain dark night in March, felt the breath of the pursuing pack close upon him. The failure to win his case had been a serious blow not only to his pride, but to his faith in his fellow man. He had gone into the trial with the assured confidence of an innocent man who is still young enough to rely absolutely upon the justice of the law. In spite of the array of damaging evidence presented by the prosecuting attorney, and the opinionated egotism of Mr. Gooch which rendered him unpopular with judge and jury, Donald's victory was almost assured, when the rumor of the People's Bank failure swept the court room. In the instant wave of suspicion that rose against Basil Sequin,

Donald's cause was lost. Half the men on the jury were directly, or indirectly, involved. The case was summarily disposed of and the smaller matter swallowed up in the larger.

Humiliated and chagrined as Donald was over his own position, he was equally concerned about the bank. The papers were full of disturbing innuendoes; people avoided speaking of it in his presence; distrust and suspicion lurked around the corners.

Donald paused at the end of the terrace and looked up at the dark massive pile of masonry above him. In every leering gargoyle and carved coping, he read the ruin of some humble home.

At the first hint of impending trouble, Mrs. Sequin had taken Margery and fled to Europe, leaving Mr. Sequin fighting with his back to the wall to meet the difficulties into which her extravagance had plunged him. "I have no fear for Basil," she assured her friends on leaving. "He 'll straighten things out. Of course he 'll be talked about, clever people always are, and the directors have been rather nasty. But he 'll control the situation yet, you 'll see."

And Mrs. Sequin's confidence was being justified. Basil Sequin was controlling the situation. He had emerged from the ruin with his finances less affected than his reputation.

Each time that Donald turned at the end of the

long terrace, his eyes involuntarily sought a light that gleamed far below through the bare trunks of the trees. It was the light from Thornwood that once more threw its familiar beams across the Cane Run Road and up the gentle slope of Billy-goat Hill. He rested his arms on the balustrade and stood looking out into the night. There was a softness in the air, a smell of upturned earth, a faint whispering among the newly budded treetops that hinted of things about to be revealed.

Suddenly there was a strange fluttering in the air above him, a tremulous, expectant thrill. Looking up he saw a flock of birds, wheeling and circling above him, making ready to light. Night after night they had traveled, over forests and across dark rivers, valiantly beating their frail wings against the gale, one purpose urging them on, straight as an arrow through the silent air,— the longing to find their old haunts under the friendly shelter of the Hill, and there to keep their love trysts in the place called home.

Donald's throat contracted sharply. Never in those tumultuous days in Japan, nor in those desperate ones in Singapore had he wanted Miss Lady as he wanted her now. It was not her youth or her beauty that he was thinking of; it was the firm confident clasp of her hand, the unfaltering courage of her eyes, her words, "I do believe in you, Don,

with all my heart and soul." He was like a starving man who must have bread even if it belongs to another. Before he knew it he was plunging down the footpath to the road.

Connie would be his excuse, although he had been rather conscience-stricken about Connie of late. She had developed a taste for exploring that beguiling land of Flirtation where the boundary lines have never been defined, and dangers are known to lurk beyond the borders. As an old and experienced adventurer he felt that he had already accompanied her too far.

As he reached Thornwood's big colonial gateway, he found some one alighting from a buggy.

"Hello, Wick!" he said. "Wait, I'll open it for you. I thought you were staying in town!"

Noah removed a pair of unmistakably new tan gloves and opened the gate for himself.

"I am staying in town," he said distantly. "Are you coming in here?"

"Yes, I think I will drop in for a little while, unless you have an engagement?"

Noah's pause was even longer than usual. "No," he drawled presently. "I can't say I have. Will you get in?"

Donald could not suppress a smile as he got in beside him, and noticed the grandeur of his toilet.

"You are getting awfully dressy these days, old chap. Who's the girl?"

"You know who it is."

"You surely don't mean Connie Queerington! Now, Wick, you want to go slow and not trifle with that girl. The first thing you know she will be falling in love with you."

Noah's lip stiffened. "If you would leave her alone perhaps she might."

"What am I doing?"

"The same thing you've always done. Going with a girl just long enough to spoil her for every other fellow, then going off and forgetting all about her."

Donald looked in amazement at the angry face beside him.

"What in thunder do you mean by that, Wick?"

"What I say. I guess it has n't been so long ago that we've both forgotten another instance."

"See here, Wick," said Donald, his anger rising, "you'd better drop this. You don't know what you are talking about."

"I know you spoiled my chances once and you are not going to spoil them again. You've got to leave Miss Connie alone. You've got to promise me —"

"I promise you nothing."

They had reached the hitching block and Donald got out of the buggy and, not waiting for his companion, went up the walk to the house. The peace of the old place wrapped him round like the folds of a warm garment. He forgot Noah, and the pursuing troubles; he forgot everything except that Thornwood, with all its memories and traditions, was for the present his, held in sacred trust until that time when he could give it back to the one who loved it best.

"Why, it 's Cousin Don!" cried Connie who had heard the wheels and come to investigate. "I never was so glad to see anybody in my life. I thought it was Mr. Wicker!"

"Cheer up! He 's hitching his horse at the block now."

"How tiresome! I thought we left him in town yesterday. I don't believe you are a bit glad to have us for a neighbor. Why did n't you come over last night? I have n't seen you for four days!"

"You have n't missed anything, Connie. I 've been down and out."

"Everybody has! It 's too stupid for words. Since the trial and the bank failure I have n't been able to get a smile out of anybody! I hope the Turtle won't be grumpy."

"Who is the Turtle?"

"Mr. Wicker. Hat calls him that, because he never lets go 'til it thunders. Aren't you coming in the parlor?"

"No, I'll give Wick the field to-night. I want to see your Father on business."

"That sounds interesting!" said Connie audaciously. "You might have spoken to me first!"

The Doctor was preparing to go up to bed when Donald entered the sitting-room, but he put down his candle and greeted him warmly.

"A phenix rising from his ashes!" he said. "I am glad to see that you have survived the trials of the past ten days. It is very kind of you to come over in the midst of your trouble to welcome us to our new quarters. You are not going to leave us, my dear?" this to Miss Lady who had risen at Donald's entrance.

"I was going to get your beef-tea."

"Oh, to be sure. I can't begin to tell you, Donald, how much I regret the decision in your case. How did it happen?"

Donald, whose hungry eyes were devouring every familiar detail of the homely fire-lit room, shrugged his shoulders. "Eleven jury-men were for acquittal, I am told, and the twelfth, a fellow named Jock Hibben talked them over."

"Jock Hibben? I know the man. A radical

Socialist who has been giving us some trouble at the university. Quite an orator, I believe, but a fanatic. You have made a motion for a new trial?"

"It has been refused."

"Indeed! And you appeal it, of course?"

"Yes."

"The decision is bound to be reversed," the Doctor assured him, "and the second trial will go in your favor. I have never doubted the ultimate outcome. What is that scratching noise?"

Miss Lady, who was just entering, paused to listen, then she suddenly set the cup she carried on the table, and flung open the door.

A long, shaggy, disheveled dog, with small, sad eyes, and a stub of a tail, hurled himself upon her, and began rapturously to lick her hands.

"It 's Mike," she cried joyously, sitting on the floor and gathering her muddy visitor into her arms. "I knew he 'd find out we were home. Oh! you blessed, blessed dog!"

Mike, unable to restrain his transports, made a mad tour of the room, upsetting the stack of manuscript that the Doctor had neatly arranged on a stand beside him. On his second round he discovered the visitor whom he sniffed with increasing excitement.

Donald raised a forefinger, and tapped his knee. In an instant Mike remembered. Lifting his fore-

paws, and dropping his head upon them, he answered the call to prayer.

Two pairs of eyes met involuntarily, and the owners smiled.

"Do put him out, my dear," urged the Doctor, who had stooped to pick up the scattered sheets of his manuscript. "This is the last volume of my series, Donald. You remember I was collecting data for it when you were at the university. I had expected to publish it this spring, but it will have to be postponed now."

Donald winced. "On account of the bank failure, I suppose?"

"Well, yes. Basil advises a curtailment of all expenditure for the present. However, it may be just as well to publish in the fall. That will give me three more months on the revision."

"I hope you were not seriously involved, Doctor?"

"No, no, I imagine not," said the Doctor vaguely as he made a marginal correction on one of the sheets. "Basil and I have been so much occupied that we have scarcely had a chance to discuss the matter. He said I might possibly lose something, but that he would protect my interests. I trust you are not one of the losers?"

"No," Donald said shortly, "I lost nothing." Then after a pause during which he stared at the

floor, he looked up. "Doctor, I want to consult you about something. Your standards of right and wrong seem to me a bit surer than most people's. I 'm in trouble and I want your advice."

He was looking at the Doctor as he spoke, but he was acutely conscious of the slender figure that stood with her back to them before the open fire.

"You see," he said, plunging into his subject, "a week before the bank failed I found that I might need a lot of ready money before I got through with the trial. So I sold all my People's Bank stock."

"That was fortunate."

"But, Doctor! Don't you see? At the time I sold the shares they were n't worth the paper they were printed on!"

"But you were ignorant of this."

"Of course; but does that alter the fact that I took money for stock that was worthless?"

The Doctor rubbed his hands together thoughtfully. For once he was not prepared to give an immediate answer to a question concerning a moral issue.

"On the spur of the moment I should advise you to refund the money, but I do not know if such advice is wise. The fact is, neither you nor I are sufficiently versed in financial matters to know what

is customary in such cases. What does your brother-in-law advise?"

"I have had no conversation with him since the bank failed. He stays in town nearly every night, and you can imagine what his days are."

"Well, I should put the matter before him, explain my scruples, and then act unquestioningly on his advice. It has been my rule in life, when my own judgment did not suffice, to consult the highest available authority upon that given subject and abide by it. Basil Sequin, in spite of this unfortunate failure, is undoubtedly our ablest financier. I can only bid you do as I have done; leave everything entirely to him."

"I should n't!" cried Miss Lady, wheeling about with a return of her old, childlike, impetuous manner; "I should n't leave it to anybody. I 'd buy back the stock, every share of it. I would n't keep money for which I 'd given nothing! You ought to see Miss Ferney Foster! She bought bank stock only last week; gave all the money she 'd made on her pickles for ten years, and when she found the bank had failed, she went out of her head. I 've been there to-day and she did n't know me."

"Who sold her the stock?"

"A broker named Gilson."

"It was my stock," Donald cried. "Of course

she 's got to be paid back! And all the rest of them. I 'll buy back every share of it, if it takes my last dollar!"

"Will it take all you have?" Miss Lady scanned his face anxiously.

"Yes, and more. I made an investment with some of the money before I knew the bank was in trouble; then there 's the double liability law. It would n't matter so much if it were n't for the trial."

"Your sister, of course, will be ready to help you. Or has she, too, lost?"

"No," said Donald, his lips tightening, "she has n't lost. She 's had no stock in the bank for a year. But I shan't call upon her."

"Because she opposed your course so violently? Oh, I see. A point of honor on which I quite agree with you. But you are not going under, Donald. We will see to that. I am not a wealthy man, as you know. There have been times recently when the future looked very dark. But this little lady has steered us into calmer waters. If you should, in the course of the next few months, be in need of a reasonable sum, I am happy to say we will be in a position to accommodate you."

Donald gripped his hand. "I shan't call on you, Doctor. But once I 'm through with this accursed trial, I 'll try to justify your belief in me."

The tall clock in the hall gave a preliminary

wheeze, then hiccoughed nine times violently. The Doctor carefully arranged his voluminous papers in a shabby, brown portfolio, and rose with an effort.

"You will excuse me now if I bid you good night? My physician has become rather arbitrary in regulating my hours. Keep up your courage, my boy; that courage that 'scorns to bend to mean devices for a sordid end.' I admire the course you have taken, I admire you. Good night to you both."

They watched him go, with his tall, stooped figure, and his fine, serious eyes that saw life only through the stultifying medium of books. Then they looked at each other.

"I 'll call Connie," Miss Lady said, moving to the door.

"Just a minute, please."

She came back reluctantly, and stood with her hands clasped on the back of a chair, breathing quickly.

"Do you remember," Donald asked, standing in front of her and speaking in a low, tense voice, "the last time we stood in this room, and the promises I made you? Well, I 've kept them. I 've fought like the devil,— You don't know what it means, you can't know. But I 've kept them. Now I want to tell you that I 've got to break over. You are right about the bank-stock money. It 's not mine. I 'll pay it back to-morrow. But more money has to

come from somewhere to carry on the trial. There 's only one chance I can think of. I 've got to enter Lickety Split for the Derby."

"No, you have n't! There are other ways. You must go to work."

"Work!" he broke out fiercely. "Have n't I been trying to get a position ever since I came home? Who wants to tie up to me until this cursed case is decided? I have been trying to write, but my things come back faster than I can send them out. What am I good for? A game at billiards, *sixty* miles an hour in a motor car, a lark with any idler that happens in the club. Bah! I 'm sick of having people patronize me because I am not in the game, because I 've never earned a penny, except by gambling, in my life!"

"But that 's all behind you, Don! You 've got the rest of your life to live differently. When the case is decided —"

"Yes, and suppose it goes against me? It did before, it may again. Talk about justice and truth! I 've failed to find them. I 've had enough of this glorious thing called life; I 'm ready to quit."

"You can't quit, Don!" She said it softly, with the firelight flushing her eager, solicitous face. "Don't you suppose we all want to quit sometimes? We 've just got to take a fresh grip on our courage

and fight it out. I 'm in trouble myself, to-night, Don. Will you help me?"

His eyes flew to hers as he half knelt on the chair before her.

"I 've sold Thornwood," she went on, her lips trembling. "I can hardly speak of it, even yet. I feel like a traitor to Daddy, to all the Carseys who ever lived here, to myself! You know what the place means to me. I believe I should die if I ever saw any one else living here! I don't know who bought it, I don't want to know. All I know is that I 've been perfectly wretched every hour since I signed the paper, until just now when the Doctor offered to lend you the money. Oh! Don, if I thought selling Thornwood meant that we could help clear your name, there 'd never be another instant of regret! You 'll let us help you?"

He put up his hand as if to ward off a blow: "Don't," he said harshly. "I can't take your help. I can't even take your friendship, or the Doctor's. Don't you see that I 'm going through hell? Don't you know that I love you?"

The color left her face, and her eyes wavered a moment, then steadied.

"You must never say that again, Don! You must try not to think of it. I 'll forgive you because I want you to forgive me for something. You

know the letter you sent me from San Francisco? I burned it, unopened, right there where you are standing now. It was a cowardly thing to do, even though I thought you were in the wrong. If I had known the truth I never would have kept silent all those months. It was a great wrong I did you, Don; can you forgive me?"

He studied her face, as if he would by sheer intensity probe those luminous eyes that said everything and nothing. At last his head dropped.

"I was a fool ever to think you cared," he said brokenly; "I knew I was n't good enough for you. I knew it from the first, but I tried. Shall I keep on trying for your sake?"

"No, Don, not for mine. For your own, and for the sake of the girl you 'll some day make your wife. But I want you to remember that I shall feel responsible for whatever happens to you. If you give up the fight and go back to the old life, I shall know it was because I failed you; if you succeed, as I believe you will, I shall be happy always in knowing that I had a little part in it. Shall we say good night?"

He took the hand she offered him and one of those silences followed which once having passed between a man and woman, is remembered above all spoken words, a silence in which all barriers fall

"It was a great wrong I did you Don, can you forgive me?"

away, and soul speaks to soul. It was like a great harmony quivering with beautiful things unsaid.

He left her standing in the firelight, her eyes shining strangely in her otherwise passive face. He closed the door resolutely on the light and warmth of the homelike, cheery room, and passing out to the road, miserably turned his steps toward the empty grandeur of the big house whose turreted and gabled roof broke the sky-line at the top of the Hill.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN two of the gloomiest and dirtiest little rooms in the dirtiest and gloomiest of little streets that dangle at loose ends from the courthouse yard, Mr. Gooch had his office. It was a small dark place that suggested nothing so much as an overflowing scrap-basket. Papers littered the table, and spilled out of every pigeon-hole of the old secretary; papers lay in stacks along the book-shelves, and bulged from fat envelopes on the mantel-shelf. Over and above and under all lay the undisturbed dust of months.

In the corner which was reduced to perpetual twilight by the proximity of the jail wall adjoining, Noah Wicker sat on his high stool, and by the assistance of a solitary swinging light, excavated lumps of legal lore from the mines of wisdom about him. To one who had not seen Noah since his first days of attorneyship, he presented an unfamiliar appearance. His feet, still hooked awkwardly under the rung of the stool, were shod in patent leather shoes of a style so pronounced that they rendered him slightly pigeon-toed. His clothes were of the most

approved cut, and his hosiery reflected the hue of his tie.

His hair, only, was reminiscent of the country youth who had emerged from the law school a short time before, in store clothes and creaking boots. A front lock that has been assiduously urged to stand up for many years, is not inclined to sit down at the first whim of its owner. It has reached an age of independence, and is inclined to insist upon its rights.

Noah, alone in the office one spring day, surreptitiously took from his desk a small object, which he held in the palm of his broad hand, and studied minutely. When the rays from the swinging electric happened to strike it, it sent spots of light dancing on the grimy ceiling. For Noah was becoming anxious about his pompadour and could not refrain from examining it at frequent intervals. Every expedient had been resorted to from surgery to soap, but the stubbly blond lock defied him. It seemed the last barrier that rose between him and cosmopolitan life.

A light step on the stairs sent the mirror into the desk, and brought a look of absorbed concentration to his expansive brow.

"Is Mr. Gooch here?" asked Connie Queerington, thrusting a plumed hat into his range of vision.

Noah disengaged himself from the stool and came

forward eagerly, but paused when he found that she was not alone.

"Come on in, Gerald," she said hospitably. "You know Mr. Wicker, don't you? At any rate he knows you. I've told him reams about you, haven't I, Mr. Wicker?"

Noah bowed gravely, and after bringing forward chairs, retired to his desk, in a state of outward calm and inward wrath.

Gerald Ivy daintily dusted the chair with his handkerchief, and sat down, nursing one silk-clad ankle across his knee, in order not to expose more of his garments than was necessary to the grime of Mr. Gooch's abode.

"What a nuisance he isn't here!" said Connie. "I could leave Father's message but I left word for Hat to meet me here. What time do you have to go, Gerald?"

"Four o'clock," said Gerald, then glancing at the clock, "it's only three-thirty now."

"The clock is slow," announced Noah unexpectedly from his corner.

Gerald leisurely removed his gloves. "What does half an hour matter when I can spend it with you? I was just going to meet Mater at the jail where she has been pinning rosebuds on repentant bosoms. Come, tell me all about yourself!" He leaned forward with elbows on his knees, and hands clasped,

dropping his voice to a confidential tone, and bringing the whole battery of his glances to play upon her.

"Why should I?" asked Connie archly. "You have n't been near me since I went to the country."

"What was the use? You could n't expect me to compete with a hero, who is making such a grandstand play as Morley. Giving himself up for an act he says he did n't commit, refunding money when he does n't have to, going to work as a scrub reporter when he has lived like a lord all his life! I don't see how the theatrical managers have overlooked him! He is the stuff matinée idols are made of. He 's turned the heads of half the girls in town!"

"He 's turned mine all right," said Connie complacently. "I 'm crazy about him. And he is n't doing all those things for effect either. He is not that kind. Is he, Mr. Wicker?"

Noah, thus suddenly appealed to, was compelled to answer truthfully that he was not. But he did so with a protesting jerk of the elbow, that sent an ink-bottle flying to the floor.

Gerald took advantage of the mishap to get Connie over to the window.

"It 's beastly lonesome without you," he whispered. "When are you coming home?"

"Heaven knows!" said Connie, putting her hands

behind her for safe-keeping. "Now that somebody else has rented the College Street house, and Miss Lady has sold Thornwood, I don't know what 's to become of us."

"Don't you miss me a little bit?" asked Gerald, playing with the silver purse on her wrist.

"Of course I do, silly. Is my hat on straight? I wish I had a mirror."

Noah kneeling on the floor, mopping up the ink, reached toward the desk, and then paused.

"I 'll be your mirror!" said Gerald, presenting his eyes in a way that only a very near-sighted person could have taken advantage of.

"City Hall clock 's striking four," said Noah grimly.

But Noah's desire to have Connie to himself was not to be gratified. No sooner had Gerald gone, than Hattie arrived, very slim and angular, and carrying a prodigious stack of school-books.

"What was the sense of my meeting you here?" she demanded of Connie, wasting no time on amenities. "You 've made me miss the four-two train, and come out of my way. What did you want with me?"

"I wanted to use your mileage book, dear," said Connie sweetly. "How long do you suppose it will be, Mr. Wicker, before Mr. Gooch comes in?"

"Any minute now," said Noah, smoothing down

his hair with an inky finger. "I — I think the clock is a little fast." Then as Connie laughed, he jerked up the top of his desk and disappeared behind it.

"Stuffy old place!" said Connie, wandering about the room. "If Mr. Gooch was n't so stingy he 'd have it cleaned up."

"I would n't call a man stingy who had given a library to the law school," Hattie objected.

"Yes, and he 's spent the rest of his life saving every penny to pay himself back for it. He has eaten fifty-two suppers a year at our house for ten years, that 's five hundred and twenty suppers, and he 's never even treated us to a chocolate sundae!"

"I don't think it 's stingy to be economical," Hattie said with her most superior air.

Noah, who was facing the open door, suddenly began making strange gestures, and violent appeals for silence, but the girls were off on an old argument and did not see him.

"Besides," Connie was saying conclusively, "he cheats at cards; you know he does."

"Only at solitaire. I don't see any reason why he should n't cheat himself if he wants to. He 's all right, even if he is queer, and I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself to talk about him the way you do!"

"How do you do, Harriet?" said Mr. Gooch dryly, entering from the outer room and not

glancing at Connie. "A message from your father?"

Connie slipped the note into Hattie's hand and took refuge with Noah behind the desk top.

"Did he hear?" she whispered hysterically. Then not waiting for a reply she pounced upon an object in the desk. "Is that a mirror?"

Noah shamefacedly produced it.

"Hold it for me," she commanded. "Not so far off. Like that!"

Standing there behind the desk holding his little mirror for her to powder her nose seemed to Noah the apotheosis of romance.

"Too much?" she asked, tilting her face for inspection. "And is my hat right? I want to look my best, because you know I *may* meet Donald Morley on the steps."

She was evidently not disappointed, for Noah, standing at the window waiting to catch the last flutter of her feather as she passed up the street, had to wait five agonizing minutes, at the end of which Don spoke to him from the door.

"Hello, Wick. Is Mr. Gooch here?"

"He was a minute ago."

"Is he coming back?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure."

Noah made the answers in a tone that discouraged further conversation, and Donald after a sharp

glance at him, shrugged his shoulders and picked up a book. He had not long to wait before Mr. Gooch returned.

"I've been telephoning all over town for you," said the lawyer testily. "Is this rumor true that you have bought back your bank stock?"

"It is. It was the only honest thing I could do."

"Not at all," complained Mr. Gooch, who became passionately attached to the contrary opinion the moment he ascertained yours. "It was a most quixotic, a most reckless course to take. I suppose you know of the double liability?"

"Yes, I know," Donald flung out impatiently.

"You are singularly fortunate, Mr. Morley, to be able to indulge these magnanimous whims. Your resources I presume —"

"My resources consist in a piece of real estate and a couple of race horses. That's about all that's left."

"The real estate?" Mr. Gooch looked encouraged. "City property?"

"No, it's a farm."

"Where?"

"On the Cane Run Road."

Noah's head appeared above the desk for the first time during the conversation and he looked surprised, as if he had made a discovery.

"Adjoining your sister's property, I judge?" con-

tinued Mr. Gooch. "That 's good, very good. It ought to bring about —?"

"It 's not for sale," said Donald shortly.

Mr. Gooch, who had emerged to the rim of his shell, promptly went in again.

"You see, Mr. Gooch," said Donald, leaning forward and speaking earnestly, "when you took this case I had no need to think of the financial end of it. I wanted to get the affair straight, and I did n't care a hang what it would cost. Since then things have changed. I think it 's only fair to tell you that after I sell my horses and settle things up, there won't be more than a thousand dollars left. Will that cover your fee?"

Mr. Gooch was visibly offended. "It is not my custom, sir, to name a sum in advance. There 's a great deal of work on this case, of a very annoying nature. We might try to come under the amount stipulated, and in a pinch of course you could sell the real estate."

"No," said Donald, "I shall not sell it. And I 've got to know to-day what your terms will be. I 've got work with the *Herald-Post* as temporary correspondent at the Capitol. I 'm going up there to-morrow, and will probably stay on until my case is called. I 'd like to have your definite answer at once."

"Well, I did n't want the case in the beginning,"

said Mr. Gooch. "It 's the sort of thing I don't care for. I might be able to finish it for a thousand dollars, but I don't know that I 'd care to commit myself."

"Very well," said Donald, rising with spirit. "That means that I 'll have to get another lawyer."

"You 'll be making a mistake," said Mr. Gooch, twisting his small features into a hard knot, and watching Donald closely. "It 's a great risk to change lawyers in the middle of a case. There 's a great deal at stake. You ought n't to stand back on a question of money at a critical time like this."

"Good Lord, man! I 'm not standing back on a question of money! I 'd put up all I had if it was a million. Do you suppose I would have taken a job in Frankfort for ten dollars a week if I had any money?"

"But you still hold property!"

"I do, Mr. Gooch, and for reasons you could never understand I shall continue to hold it. Good day."

"Stop a minute!" Noah Wicker unfolded himself in sections, and got to his feet.

"Suppose you let me take your case."

Donald and Mr. Gooch looked at him with equal amazement.

"I have n't had much experience," Noah went on slowly and grimly. "I did n't even know a repu-

table lawyer could throw a case over in the middle when a client lost his money. I've got a lot to learn. But I do know this case from end to end, and I know you, Don Morley. If I can't clear you with or without money, I'd better give up the practice of law right here and now. Do you think you'd be willing to trust me?"

Donald hesitated for a moment, glancing from Noah's honest, homely face to Mr. Gooch's sneering one, then he jumped to a decision.

"It's a go, Wick! And the fee—"

Noah extended a hand, the breadth of whose palm has already been commented upon.

"The fee be damned," he drawled.

CHAPTER XXIV

DONALD MORLEY packed his few belongings and went on his small mission for the *Herald-Post* with a determination worthy of a larger cause. The remuneration was less than he had been in the habit of paying his stable boy, but failure to secure a position, together with a depleted bank account, had chastened his spirit, and he was ready to grasp at anything that would give him a chance to justify the belief of his friends.

When he first arrived at the sleepy little town where the state transacted its business, he took two rooms at the hotel. Later he moved to a boarding-house, and by the end of the third week he was in a small, bare room in an office building, eating his breakfasts at the depot, his luncheons at a restaurant, and his dinners at the hotel. For in his determination to square himself with the world he had managed to dispose of nearly all he had, excepting a thousand dollars which he had secretly deposited to Noah's account.

At first poverty was a somewhat diverting novelty; it served to keep his mind off those pursuing

terrors that had filled his horizon. For the first time in life he was economizing for a purpose. But to make the usual expenditure of a day extend over a week requires forethought and judgment, neither of which qualities Donald possessed. He had counted on augmenting the small sum received from the *Herald-Post* by writing feature articles for other papers, but his efforts had met with small success. In vain he arranged his article after the exact plan laid down by Cropsie Decker. He clipped, pasted and pinned, looked up statistics, verified statements and ruthlessly weeded out every little vagrant fancy that dared intrude on the solemn company of facts. But his efforts when finished bore the same relation to Cropsie's that a pile of bricks does to a house.

Only once had he set Cropsie and his lapboard literature aside, and followed his own impulse. It was after his first call at the Queeringtons', when the Doctor had advised him to choose a congenial theme and let his fancy have full rein. A word of encouragement was all he needed to begin a series of tales that had burned for utterance ever since he left India. They were the adventures related to him by his Mohammedan bearer, Khalil Samad, who had sat on his heels many a night before the young sahib's fire, and spun yarns of marvelous variety. Donald had only to close his eyes to see the keen, subtle face surmounted by its huge white turban,

and to hear the torrent of picturesque broken English that poured from the lips of one of the few Mohammedans in India who could curse the various natives in their own vernacular from the Khyber Pass to Trichinopoli.

But the story of Khalil's adventures having been launched into unknown waters, had not yet been heard from, and Donald patiently returned to his feature articles, holding himself down to the actual and being bored as only a person with a creative imagination can be bored by the naked, unadorned truth.

His one consolation these days was in the fact that Miss Lady would not have to give up Thornwood. Through an agent he had leased the place to the Queeringtons for the next two years at an absurdly low sum, and the thought of her in the midst of her beloved surroundings went far to reconcile him to the meagerness of his own.

His dingy little room boasted only an iron bed and washstand, the rest of the floor space being principally occupied by his imposing brass-bound steamer-trunk covered with foreign labels. On the dusty shelf over the washstand stood an incongruous array of silver-mounted, monogramed toilet articles; around the wall ran a dado of shoes, while from the gas-pipe depended a heavy bunch of neckties. The chief inconvenience in being poor, Donald had de-

cided, was in not knowing what to do with one's things.

It was not only his things, however, that he found difficulty in disposing of. For a given number of hours a day a man can hold himself down to the task of sitting at a small deal table, covering yellow tablets with words that will probably never be read, but after too long a stretch nature is apt to rebel. At such times Donald raged like a pent lion. His mind involuntarily flew to the possibility of this confinement being but a foretaste of the other that waited for him should the rehearing not be granted. From the beginning he had refused to consider the possibility of conviction; he was innocent, he would be cleared. But as the days dragged on, a shadow began to dog his steps and to sit on the foot of his bed by night, grinning at him through bars of iron.

Had there been a friend to whom he could turn during these days he might have been spared some of the hours of anguish he endured, but his pride was cut to the quick, and he shrank from seeing any one who knew him or his family. Cropsie Decker could have helped him, but Cropsie was in Mexico. To Noah Wicker he had ceased to be an individual, he had become a client, a first client, and personalities were swamped in abstractions. The only place where he could have found sympathy and understanding was at Thornwood, the hospitable door of

which he had resolutely closed with his own hand. If he thought the depths of loneliness had been sounded out there in the Orient, he had now to learn that it is only in one's own country, among one's own people, that the plummet strikes bottom.

The day before the case was to be presented Noah came up from the city, and once again they went over every tiresome, familiar detail. By the time evening arrived Donald was in a state of black dejection. Half a dozen sleepless nights, and the return of several articles did not tend to brighten the situation, and when Noah accepted an invitation from the Judge to dine with him, Donald felt that he had been abandoned to his fate.

Twilight was closing in, the kind that has no beginning and no end, a damp, gray saturating twilight that smothers the soul in a fog of gloom and relaxes all the moral fibers. Donald went to his small window and looked out. The street below was deserted, save for an occasional shabby surrey, splashing through the mud on its way to the station. At long intervals an umbrella bobbed past, and once a drove of cattle lumbered by, driven by a boy astride a mule. Donald jerked down the shade savagely, and lit the single gas-jet.

In a magazine which he picked up was a graphic article on child labor in the mines, giving pictures of ragged, emaciated children who spent their lives

underground, breathing foul air and becoming dwarfed in body and soul. He flung the book from him and dropped his head upon his arms. Life seemed a great, inexorable machine, setting at naught human aspiration, human endeavor. What was the good of fighting it? What was the sense in believing in a divine order, in such infernal chaos?

Unable to stand his own company any longer, he seized his hat and started for the hotel. He was in a reckless, hopeless mood, ready to take diversion wherever he found it, and as is usual in such cases, diversion met him half way.

The little hotel office was in a spasm of activity, bells were ringing, doors slamming, and guests arriving. The group of loiterers who usually sat facing the fire, criticizing the daily proceedings of the legislature, now stood in a semicircle with their backs to it, watching the new arrivals.

"It's a theatrical company," explained one of the voluble crowd to Donald; "the liveliest lay-out we've had for moons. That's the star talking to the fellow in the checked suit. Some winner, isn't she?"

The object of this remark, having just told a story that elicited a round of laughter, turned carelessly and swept the room with a brilliant, experienced glance. The searchlight passed the porter

and bell boys, the obsequious clerk at the desk, the semicircle of admirers at the fire, and came to an audacious pause when it reached Donald Morley.

He was lighting a cigarette at the moment, and presented an appearance of colossal indifference to all stars, terrestrial and celestial. But when he had tossed the match into the open grate, he nonchalantly sauntered to the desk and glanced at the register.

There was the dashing signature, the ink still wet on the flourish,

"La Florine."

It was Cropsie Decker's old flame, "The Serpent of the Nile," whom he had last seen poised on the cork of a champagne bottle on a poster on Billy-goat Hill! Without looking up he was aware that the same mischievous eyes which had peeped through the black-gloved fingers on the poster, were watching him now with the liveliest interest. They followed him across the room, they laughed at him over the shoulder of the man in the checked suit, they flung a challenge at his feet, and dared him pick it up.

Donald watched her with increasing fascination. It was good just to be near anything so careless, and gay, and irresponsible. He, too, had once poised tiptoe on the perilous edge of things, and laughed defiance in the face of Fate. Why should n't he

do it again? A man about to be hanged is given a last good dinner, why should n't he humor himself to one more good time before the die was cast on the morrow?

It would only be necessary to present his card and mention Cropsie Decker, and the rest would be easy. He had just about enough money to pay for a theater ticket, and a cozy little supper afterward. But what about flowers?

He thrust his hand eagerly into his pocket on an investigating tour. As he did so his fingers encountered a small, hard object which he drew forth and looked at curiously. It was the dried hip of a wild rose, that had been transferred from pocket to pocket since the day it dared to bloom before its time, in a cranny of the stone wall that circled the garden at Thornwood. The touch of it brought back an old barrel hammock under the lilacs, and the glowing eyes of a girl, lifted to his with a look of trusting innocence.

Without another glance at "The Serpent of the Nile," he turned up his coat collar, pulled his hat over his eyes and plunged out into the wet, dismal street. For hours he tramped, neither knowing nor caring where he went. He was fighting the hardest fight a man is called on to fight, the fight against himself with no reward in view.

When he got back to his room, spent and di-

sheveled at nine o'clock, he found two letters under his door. One, a black-bordered envelope addressed in Connie's familiar scrawl, he thrust into his pocket, smiling in spite of himself at the memory of Miss Lady's bargain stationery. The other, a long, bulky envelope, bearing the device of a well-known magazine, caused him to sit limply down on his steamer-trunk and gaze at it miserably.

His cherished story had come back at last! The possibility of its being accepted had been the one hope he had clung to during many a desperate hour. In it he had, for the first time, dared to say the things he felt, to venture boldly into the land of romance which hitherto he had cautiously skirted. Dozens of other similar tales were teeming in his brain, only waiting to know the fate of this one. And it had come back! It was the best he had to offer, and his best was not good enough! He looked at the shabby, dog-eared sheet, and the folded enclosure that doubtless set forth the editor's smug regrets, then with an impatient gesture he flung the envelope and its contents into the scrap-basket, cursing himself and his conceit in thinking he could write, and editors and their conceit in thinking they could judge.

The folded enclosure, meanwhile, that had been in the manuscript elected to disprove the total depravity of inanimate things, and instead of falling face

downward, fell face upward on the very top of the heap. Thus it was that Donald Morley, charging desperately about his limited quarters, suddenly spied a word that made him snatch up the sheet of paper and rush to the light.

The editor, it appeared, had read the story with genuine pleasure. Khalil Samad was an entirely new creation, presented with an originality and humor altogether delightful. The one fault of the story was its brevity. Of course, the magazine would accept it as it was, but the opinion of the office was to the effect that if the author had material for other stories of a similar nature it was a pity for him not to elaborate it into a book. A novel with Khalil Samad for a hero, if written with the same charm as this first story, would be an undoubted success. This was merely a suggestion, of course, and might not fall in with Mr. Morley's other literary plans. In any case the editor congratulated him upon the originality of his story and would look forward to publishing it in one form or the other.

Donald read the note through twice before he mastered its contents, then he drew a prodigious breath. Other stories of a similar nature? Why, he knew dozens of them! Khalil Samad had been his sole companion for two months, and Khalil's chief occupation had been talking about himself and

his escapades. Donald knew the main incidents of his dramatic career from the time he had been stolen by a Bengali bandit and sold into matrimony at the age of ten, to the day he had salaamed a tearful farewell from the dock at Bombay.

Yes, most certainly, the writing of the novel *did* fall in with Mr. Morley's literary plans. But what about his other plans? He caught himself up suddenly. How did he know what twenty-four hours might bring forth? What if, through some terrible error, he was not granted a new hearing? But Noah Wicker was confident. He had discovered a point in the former trial which was technically inadmissible. A witness had been permitted to make a statement over Mr. Gooch's objection, and Noah had succeeded in finding a previous decision that made him believe a reversal was practically certain.

Somehow since his story was accepted, Donald found it much easier to share Noah's confidence. Waves of returning courage swept over him. Perhaps after all, he was going to be able to do something worth while in the world! He would work like a Trojan, he would begin to-night.

He seized pen and paper, but the desire to share his good news prompted him to write letters rather than fiction. He wanted to tell Miss Lady, he wanted to tell the Doctor. He wanted to paralyze Cropsie Decker! Then he thought of Noah, and

ramming the editor's note in his pocket, he went plunging down the steps and across to the hotel.

Noah had gone to bed, but he was unceremoniously routed out.

"Read that!" shouted Don, thrusting his hand in his pocket and pulling out an envelope.

"It is n't opened," said Noah, yawning; then recognizing Connie Queerington's handwriting he suddenly woke up.

"Hang it! That 's the wrong one," said Donald, diving for the other note. "Here it is! Behold a budding author, Wick! I 've written some stuff they say is worth while. They want more!"

Noah read the note, then returned it calmly.

"It 's encouraging, I congratulate you," he observed laconically.

Donald's face clouded, then cleared and he stepped forward impulsively:

"See here, Wick," he said, "you think I 'm poaching on your preserves. I 'm not. That 's the first letter I have had from Connie for weeks. I have n't written her a line since I left home, but she likes to keep me on the string. She just plays with Ivy and me to keep her hand in. Don't you mind either one of us. Stick to it and win."

"Oh, I 'm sticking to it all right," said Noah doggedly, "but I don't seem to stand much chance with the rest of you."

"Nonsense, man! Think of your head-piece! The Lord started you out with more brains than most of us end with. The Judge said this morning that you knew more common law than any young lawyer he could think of."

"Yes, but knowledge of common law won't win this suit. She 'll never look at me, Donald, except as a last resort. She thinks I am a heavy, awkward hayseed, and I reckon she 's about right."

He towered there in his blue pajamas two sizes too small for him, his hair on end, and his large hands grasping the chair back. "I don't know the game," he went on helplessly. "You fellows take the trick while I am making up my mind what to play. She 's too much for me. You are all too much for me, but I shan't throw down my hand, not yet."

Donald got up from the foot of the bed where he had been sitting, and took Noah by the shoulders.

"You 've been working like a dog on my case, old fellow. Suppose you let me take charge of yours?"

"How do you mean?"

"You say you don't know the rules of the game. I know them backwards and forwards and upside down. You let me play this hand for you with Connie Queerington, and you stand to win."

"But — but you?"

"Heavens, man! Do you suppose if it were anything to me I 'd have forgotten to read her letter all this time? No, I am through with that sort of thing." He turned his head abruptly and his face darkened. "There never was but one race for me, that was worth the running and I got left at the post."

"Perhaps Miss Connie —"

"Likes me? Of course she does. And I like her tremendously. That 's how I am going to help you. Leave it to me, Wick. Let me write her all the letters I want to. Let me tell her about the stir you are making up here, about the Judge cottoning to you, and the Governor asking you to dinner. In short, let me dramatize you, Wick; I 'll write her a play in five acts with you for the hero. All you have to do is to ease up on your letters and keep out of her sight for a month or so. Tell her that as long as you can't be anything more to her you will be a good friend. Connie hates a man to be a friend! She wants him to be either an acquaintance or a lover. You have gotten out of the first class, and she will never let you alone until she gets you back into the third."

Noah rubbed his massive and bewildered brow. "It 's too complicated for me," he said; "I guess I 'll have to accept your services."

That night Donald worked until the small hours, eagerly blocking out the chapters of his new book. So absorbed was he that it was not until he straightened his tired back, and started to make ready for bed that he remembered that he had not yet read Connie's letter.

It was a blotted and incoherent scrawl.

"Dear Cousin Don," he read, "I don't see how I am ever going to write, for my eyes are almost out from crying, but Miss Lady simply *can't* do everything, and somebody has to tell the relatives. Hattie ought to help me, but she thinks she has to write to her intimate friends first, and she 's got about a dozen. You know how hateful she is.

"Well, he was taken worse last week, Father, I mean. I can't go into the details for I have told them over to so many people now that I 'm about crazy, and every time I go over them I almost cry myself to death. He did n't know any of us all last night or this morning, except once he called for Miss Lady and patted her cheek. At the end he seemed to get stronger and opened his eyes and asked for his manuscript. It was the most pitiful thing you ever saw at the last, to see him trying to turn over the sheets, with his poor eyes staring out at the wall, not knowing any of us. You 'll see

about the funeral in the morning's paper. I don't see how we are ever going through with it.

"Your loving cousin,

"CONSTANCE QUEERINGTON.

"P. S. Please tell Mr. Wicker — I 'd rather die than write another letter."

CHAPTER XXV

THE summer that followed the People's Bank failure was one of those uncompromising summers that arrive in May and depart only with the last leaf in October. The river dwindling to a feeble stream staggered between distant banks, and the countryside lay parched and panting beneath an unrelenting sun.

In the city Noah Wicker toiled laboriously over his first case which had been granted a rehearing, and set for November the sixth. At the Capitol, Donald Morley sat day after day, coatless, collarless, in the torrid confines of his small bedroom, furiously covering reams of paper with compact handwriting. At Thornwood Miss Lady, who had been left in command of a sinking ship, struggled heroically to bring it into port.

One day early in July, Myrtella Flathers sat just inside the screen door of the summer kitchen, armed with a fly-spanker and a countenance of impending gloom. She was evidently rehearsing a speech, for her lips moved in scornful curves, and her bristling

black locks were tossed in defiance. Mike, venturing out of a shady corner and catching a glimpse of her face, thought her inaudible remarks were addressed to him and retired with guilty eyelid and drooping tail to the woodshed.

Myrtella's bitter reflections were interrupted by the appearance of Miss Lady on the vine-covered porch. She looked absurdly young in her widow's weeds, in spite of the fact that her color was gone and her eyes beginning to look too big for her face.

"They 've come to stay a week!" she announced, sinking wearily on the top step and casting a desperate glance at the closed shutters of the guest room above. "And it 's Friday, and Mr. Gooch will be here to supper. Do you see how we are ever going to hold out?"

"*I* ain't!" declared Myrtella, spanking a fly into eternity with deadly precision. "I 'm sick and tired of company. There ain't been a day in the three months since the Doctor died that we ain't had his kin folks on our hands. It beats my time how half the world gits a prowlin' fit every summer, and goes pestering them that stays at home. As to these old maids that come to-day, if they had a eye in their heads they 'd see you was plumb wore out. I would n't 'a' ast 'em to stay."

"But I had to. They are the Doctor's cousins. They said they 'd been coming to see him every sum-

mer for years, and they don't want to lose sight of the children."

"Umph! The children would n't mind losing sight of them! Miss Hattie got sent to bed onct for sassing the thin one that wants special dishes and all her water boiled. I bet she 'll ast you to change her mattress."

"She has already. That 's what I came out to tell you, and she wants her supper an hour earlier than ours. But that is n't what 's troubling me, Myrtella, I have something much more serious than Cousin Emily to worry over."

"You ain't no exception," said Myrtella, somewhat defensively. "Trouble is about the only thing that rich people ain't got a monopoly on. I 've had my share; it 's a wonder I got a black hair left in my head!"

"Has your brother lost his good place?" Miss Lady asked.

"Phineas? No, mam. He 's been at Iselin's ever since he left Mrs. Sequin's, an' to hear him tell it he 's runnin' the whole 'stablishment. I must say he 's doin' better 'n he ever done before, but he 's as full of airs as a music-box, an' that there Maria, a paternizing me like I had n't been payin' her rent all these years. But I kin get along without them. It 's little Chick I 'm a worryin' about."

"What 's the matter with Chick?"

"Matter with him?" Myrtella turned on her fiercely. "Ever' thing is the matter with him. What chanct has he got in the world? Picked out of a ash-barrel, livin' in dirt an' ignorance, drinkin' the beer that leaks outen the kegs on the freight cars, hangin' 'round the saloons an' gittin' runtier an' dumber an' more pitifuller every day he lives. My Lord! Ain't that enough the matter with him?"

Miss Lady's quick, eager sympathy leapt into her face.

"We must do something for Chick. Dr. Wyeth believes he can cure him if they can ever get him into the Children's Hospital. Why can't we—" she checked herself, and sat looking off to the hills across the river.

"Myrtella, I 've got to tell you something," she began again desperately, "I 've been trying to tell you all day, but I did n't know how. You have been so good to us, all through the Doctor's illness, and before. But I 'm afraid after this month we 'll have to let you go."

Myrtella had been threatening to give notice for a month, but at this announcement she looked as if she had been the victim of an unsuccessful electrocution.

"It 's a question of money," went on Miss Lady hurriedly. "You see we simply have n't any. I 've kept account of every cent that comes in and goes

out, just as Mr. Gooch told me to; but it does n't balance. We 'll just have to keep on cutting down expenses until it does."

"An' you are going to begin on me," said Myrtella furiously, "an' git in some onery nigger that 'll carry home more in a basket than my wages would come to!"

"No, Myrtella; we are going to try to do the work ourselves."

"You mean *you* are! An' Miss Connie 'll primp herself up an' go hiking into town after beaux, an' Miss Hattie 'll set around with her nose in a book, an' you 'll go on workin' an' slavin' an' wearin' yourself to the bone fer them, an' their tribe of prowlin' kin. Where 's the money you got for this farm?"

"It went to pay the debts and to carry out the Doctor's wishes."

"'Bout printin' all them books he wrote over again, an' bringin' 'em out in the same kind of covers?"

"Yes."

"How many was there, in all?"

"Twenty."

Myrtella compressed her lips, and with difficulty refrained from comment. However freely the Doctor's will had been discussed in public, no criticism of it was brooked in the presence of Miss Lady.

"As to your leaving," she said, changing the sub-

ject, while Myrtella vented her wrath on the flies, "you know you have wanted to go for months. It was only your goodness that made you come out here with us after you had saved money enough to start your boarding-house. We have n't been paying you enough, I know that, and — and we have n't enough to go on even as we are."

Myrtella wheeled in the doorway, her face purple with anger:

"If you think I 'm a-goin' an' leave you children in this big house, messin' up yer own food, an' lettin' everybody run over you, you are mighty mistaken! Miss Hattie 'd be having indigestion inside a week, an' Bertie 'd git the croup, an' you 'd have every female Queerington that could buy a railroad ticket comin' an' settin' down on you!"

"But what can we do, Myrtella? I tell you the money is giving out!"

"Do? I 'll tell you what we can do. We can board the company! We can fill up the rooms with folks that pay for what they eat, an' there won't be any room for the free prowlers. You git the boarders an' I 'll manage 'em."

"Why, Mrs. Ivy and Gerald wanted to come that way, but I laughed at them. Besides I don't know about Gerald —"

"On account of Miss Connie?" asked Myrtella, who had been too much in charge of the family not

to know its secrets. "You let him come. He 's one of them men that 's like vanilla extract — you git too much of him onct, you never want no more!"

"And perhaps Mr. Gooch would come."

"Well it would go kinder hard with him to pay fer anything he 's always got free. But git Miss Hattie to ast him. He 'd do it fer her quicker 'n anybody."

The project, under Myrtella's able generalship, developed immediately. Mr. Gooch and the Ivys gladly availed themselves of the opportunity of fleeing from the stifling city to the cool shade of Thornwood. Two former pupils of the Doctor's, who were taking a summer course at the university, also asked if they might have a room, and at the end of a week paying guests were in possession and the family relegated to any nook or corner that was large enough to accommodate a bed.

One problem was unexpectedly solved by the appearance of Uncle Jimpson, who announced that "he had done come back home to stay." The distinction of driving forth daily in solitary grandeur to exercise the Sequins' horses, had palled upon him, and the prospect of conducting the Queerington boarders back and forth to the station, and renewing his intimacy with old John and Mike, had proven irresistible.

Aunt Caroline had died in the early spring, and

Uncle Jimpson found even the society of Myrtella a relief after his enforced loneliness. He listened with bulging eyes and sagging jaw to her accounts of the latest murders and obeyed her slightest command with a briskness that would have amazed the old Colonel.

"We 's helpin' Miss Lady git a start," he would say proudly again and again, "an' then maybe she git married some more."

"Married!" Myrtella would flare, "yes, she orter git married to another widower with three children, and a thousand kin folks. Besides, who 's she going to marry?"

"Ain't no trouble 'bout dat," Uncle Jimpson said wisely; "you jes' let her peek over de blinds onct, an' you see what gwine happen."

"Well, she ain't going to peek," Myrtella said firmly. "She ain't got a thought in her head, but gittin' Miss Hattie an' Bertie educated, an' keepin' Miss Connie straight, an' carryin' out that fool will of the Doctor's."

"Jest wait," Uncle Jimpson smilingly insisted, "dat chile can't no more help 'cumulatin' beaux dan a flower kin bees. An' hits de king bee dat 's comin' dis time, shore!"

CHAPTER XXVI

"WHERE'S Connie? Where's Hat?" cried Miss Lady breathlessly, bringing her foam-flecked horse to a halt in front of the porch where Mrs. Ivy was sitting in the twilight. "Don Morley has written a book and it's going to be published this month!"

"A book!" echoed Mrs. Ivy incredulously, then, "Ah, my dear, do get off that vicious beast; I haven't had a moment's peace since Mr. Wicker sent him over!"

Miss Lady slipped to the ground and stood with her arm around Prince's neck, laughing. The thrill of her long ride, the first one in nearly two years, still surged through her, and the news just received made her heart dance for joy. Happiness, in spite of her efforts not to expect it, was beginning to shine across the troubled waters, a dim and wavering light as yet, but drawing her toward it with irresistible fascination. It was something to steer by in times of stress and storm, something to turn to tremulously, in the lonely hours of the night, when over-

taxed muscles refused to relax and her tired brain ached with the pity and sorrow of the world.

During her long ride this afternoon she had dared for the first time to give rein to thoughts that had hitherto been held in check. Surely life was more than the dreary, monotonous, loveless business of the past summer! With all its problems and perplexities, it was nevertheless a mysterious, fascinating thing. She did not approve of it, nor did she altogether trust it, but she was incorrigibly in love with it — and would be to the end.

"I suppose you know that supper is over," said Mrs. Ivy, with veiled reproach. "Were there no letters for me?"

"Oh, dear, how stupid of me. I forgot to look through the rest of the mail. Here it is."

Mrs. Ivy sorted out her own official-looking budget, then peered closely at the two remaining envelopes.

"As I suspected," she said with a significant lifting of her eyebrows; "two for Constance, in the same handwriting and both postmarked from the Capitol."

"But what of it, Mrs. Ivy?"

"My *dear,*" Mrs. Ivy breathed, "don't you see they are from Mr. Morley?"

"Yes; but I have one from him, too; he 's telling us about his book."

Mrs. Ivy smiled with sad superiority, "Ah, my dear, you are not a very sophisticated little chaperon. I have hesitated to speak to you before, but I really think this young man's attention to Constance should be stopped. It is n't fair to poor Gerald. You know how she has always adored my boy, ever since she was in pinafores, and I don't mind confessing to you that I 've encouraged her. Of course Gerald's artistic temperament has made him susceptible to many forms of beauty, but he has really been quite devoted of late. I simply can not endure the thought of that Mr. Morley interfering with the blossoming of their childhood love."

"But Mrs. Ivy, he — he is her cousin; he looks upon her as a child."

"She is only a year younger than you are, my dear, and much more worldly wise. I 've had my eyes open and I 've seen a great deal. She is getting quite secretive, and she is n't always gracious to Gerald. Mr. Morley 's back of it all, you 'll see."

"I don't think there is any danger," said Miss Lady critically examining the tip of Prince's nose.

"Ah, my dear girl, you have been too engrossed for the past six months to notice. Ask Mr. Wicker; he spoke to Gerald about it last spring. Ask Gerald himself, he 's wretchedly unhappy. And now you are helping her to get ready to go up to the Capitol to visit, and he 's sure to see her every day. I must

say that I think it 's wretched taste for him to pay attentions to any girl under the circumstances."

In an instant Miss Lady had wheeled with flashing eyes:

"Donald's friends know that he has n't done anything to be ashamed of! I don't believe he thinks of Connie in the way you mean, but if he does she has every reason to be proud of it!"

And without waiting for an answer she drew the bridle over her arm and tramped indignantly off to the stable.

Mrs. Ivy sighed, then turned to join Mr. Gooch who had just come out on the porch.

"Has it ever occurred to you," she said as if enunciating a hitherto unuttered truth, "how reluctant youth is to learn of age? This dear little widow that the good Doctor left to our care, is making some grave mistakes."

"I think she does fairly well," said Mr. Gooch, settling himself comfortably; "the beef is not always good, but the fowls and the vegetables are ex-excellent."

Mr. Gooch spoke with unusual warmth. Myrtella's cooking, together with Miss Lady's graciousness, and the sharp proprietorship that Hattie had assumed over him, were working a miracle. Even now as the sounds of music and laughter came forth

from the living-room, he paused to listen. He was surprised to find that "Molly Darlings," and "Nellie Grays," and other musical girls he'd left behind him, still haunted the dim corridors of his argumentative mind, and gave him little thrills of pleasure.

"Ah," purred Mrs. Ivy, continuing the conversation. "Far be it from me to criticize her. It is against my principles to entertain a critical attitude toward any one. Besides, I quite adore the dear child. I consider her a precious gift to a grateful world. But you must acknowledge, Mr. Gooch, that with all her sweetness, she does n't always allow herself to be guided."

"Good Lord, no," said Mr. Gooch testily. "She 'll look you straight in the eye and smile, while you are advising her, then go straight off and do as she pleases. This matter of the Doctor's will, for instance. I spent two days arguing with her about the futility of publishing two dozen volumes that nobody will ever read."

"But that was his dying request, Mr. Gooch. Only one who has loved and lost can know the nature of that obligation."

Mr. Gooch sniffed impatiently. Conjugal felicity was a subject that irritated him in every fiber.

"Then her charities," he went on crustily; "she 's

got no money to be throwing away, yet every family on Billy-goat Hill comes to her when it gets into trouble."

"Yes, and she does n't hesitate to sit down in those dreadful hovels, and take those unclean babies in her arms. It has made me frightfully nervous since we came here. Gerald is so sensitive to germs."

"What is this latest tomfoolery about a kindergarten?"

"Why, she has actually gotten Mrs. Bartrum and Mrs. Horton, and some of those other society women, to rent the hall over the grocery where the Cant-Pass-It Saloon used to be. They are going to open a kindergarten and Margery Sequin is coming home from Europe to take charge of it. I am afraid the project is built upon the sands. There is not a church member on the board!"

"Well, they need n't come to me for a contribution," said Mr. Gooch. "I don't believe in kindergartens."

While this conversation was taking place, quite a different one was in progress, on the up-stairs side porch which had been converted into a summer bedroom for Miss Lady and Bertie.

"Do you 'spose," Bert was saying sleepily, "that God 'ud give me a horn 'stead of a harp when I get to heaven, if I ask him to?"

"I know He will, Bert. Take off your other shoe."

"Why did n't He give Chick something to say?"

"He did, but Chick's throat won't let the words come through. Step out of your clothes now, hurry up, Buddikin!"

But Bert's feet were firmly planted, and his sleepy eyes fixed in philosophic musings:

"If He had all kinds of throats I don't see why He did n't give Chick a good one."

This required elucidation, and Miss Lady attempted to make the matter clear while extricating the small boy from his clothes.

"Ain't you going to tell me a story?"

"Not to-night, Bert. I 'm so tired; all the stories have run out."

Bert crawled into his bed silently, and lay watching the shadows in the big tree outside.

"I wish Cousin Don was here," he sighed. "He never does run out of stories. When is he coming back?"

"I don't know, dear. Shut your eyes now, and go to sleep."

He shut his eyes obediently, but continued the conversation drowsily,

"He knows all about whales and tigers, and big ships and elephants. He 's — been — clear — around — the — earth —"

But the Sandman had conquered, and Miss Lady, having slipped on a dressing-gown and loosened her hair, tiptoed to the far end of the porch and sitting on the railing gazed fixedly out into the gathering darkness. For half an hour the dim enchantments of twilight had been abroad, transforming hill and valley, and merging heaven and earth in a tender, elusive atmosphere of dreams. But her absorbed, white face, and tense hands locked about her knees, showed that she was not concerned with the beauty of the evening.

Mrs. Ivy's words had kindled a bonfire, by the light of which recent events leapt into view. Connie *had* been secretive, not only about her letters but about her engagements as well. She was growing daily more indifferent to Gerald Ivy, and developing a taste for reading that had been the cause of much surmising and teasing on the part of the household.

Twice during the summer Donald had come to Thornwood, and on both occasions Miss Lady had been seized with an unreasoning fear, not only of him, but of herself. She had received him under the depressing chaperonage of Mr. Gooch and Mrs. Ivy, and she remembered now how Connie had taken possession of him on both occasions. But even if Connie's transitory affections were temporarily engaged, surely Donald was not encouraging her!

A low whistle from the path below made her look

down. It was Connie and she was stepping very cautiously as if trying to elude somebody.

"Miss Lady!" she called softly. "Are n't you coming down again?"

"No, I 'm going to bed."

"Don't go yet. I 'm coming up. I want to tell you something."

A moment later Connie opened the door, and closed it carefully behind her.

"Is Bertie asleep?"

"Yes."

"It 's all over!" she announced tragically. "Gerald and I have had an awful quarrel, and he swears he 'll never live to see another dawn."

"Of course he won't, I doubt if he has ever seen one. What 's his trouble?"

"Everything! He wants me to sit at his feet every hour in the day and adore him, and how can I adore a man who is afraid of a bumblebee, and can't drive, and sleeps with an umbrella over his head to shut out the light? I just simply can't stand him another minute!"

"But, Connie, you were so crazy about him, you would n't listen to a word against him."

"I know it. I 've been a perfect little idiot." Connie was sobbing now on Miss Lady's shoulder. "The first time I saw him he 'd just gotten home from Europe. He was playing at a concert.

Everybody said he was a genius, and his eyes were so wonderful, and I had never seen anybody like him. The more he snubbed me the crazier I got about him. It was n't until Cousin Don came back that I saw him as he really is."

Miss Lady patted the heaving shoulders, but said nothing.

"And the very minute," Connie continued tempestuously, "that I began to feel differently, Gerald began to like me. He has worked himself up to a terrible pitch, and does n't want me out of his sight for a minute. I feel as if I 'd been living on chocolate creams for three months!"

"Connie!" Miss Lady took the tear-stained face between her hands. "I 'm glad it is n't Gerald. I 'm glad from the bottom of my heart, but are you sure it is n't somebody else?"

Connie's blue eyes, never very steadfast, shifted uneasily, and Miss Lady went on earnestly:

"Are you quite sure you are n't doing just what you did before, getting infatuated, and making yourself miserable over some one who does n't care for you?"

"But he does!" burst out Connie indignantly; "he cares for me more than for anybody in the world!"

"How do you know?"

"He 's told me so! There — I ought n't to have

told! I swore I would n't until after the trial. But you won't breathe it, Miss Lady? Promise you won't even ask me to tell you anything more?"

Miss Lady looked at her strangely.

"I know everybody is going to disapprove," Connie went on recklessly, "and say horrid things about him. But I don't care if you will just stand by me. And you will, won't you?"

Twice Miss Lady tried to speak before the words would come, then:

"Yes," she whispered almost breathlessly, "yes, I promise to stand by you,— and by him."

After Connie had gone she went back to her seat on the railing and stared out into the gathering night. For the first time in her life the dark immensity terrified her. The beacon lights by which she had steered were no longer visible. The great lonely sea of life lay about her, and she had lost her course.

"Daddy!" she whispered in terror, "Daddy, help me!"

But only the faint cry of a whippoorwill in the valley below answered her call. A trembling seized her and feeling her way to the bed where Bertie lay, she crept in beside him, cuddling the soft, warm little body close, and checking her sobs that they might not wake him. Long after the whippoorwill had ceased its plaint, she lay there staring into the darkness, waiting for the dawn.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE autumn sun struggled palely through the windows of the Children's Hospital, and sent a beam across the high narrow bed where Chick Flathers lay, suspiciously watching the proceedings of the attendant nurses. He was not at all sure that he had done right in coming. For two days he had been made to stay in bed, and this morning he had suffered his third bath and been deprived of his breakfast. His being there at all was merely a concession to friendship. Mis' Queerington had persuaded him. He would n't have come for the Other One, the fat one who smiled and talked about The Willows Awful Home. He would n't even come for Aunt 'Tella, but Mis' Queerington was different; she understood fellows. She had said that the doctors would fix his throat so that he could yell louder than any boy on Billy-goat Hill! All the suppressed yells of a dozen years quivered on his lips at the thought of it!

"Chick, here 's a orange and some cookies I brought you." It was Aunt 'Tella who sat down by the bed and took his hand. "If you ever get

well Aunt 'Tella 's going to take you to the circus, or the seashore, or somewheres."

The seashore presented no concrete idea, so Chick preferred to dwell upon the circus, but even that alluring prospect could not hold his attention while so many disturbing things were taking place about him. One nurse had felt his pulse, another had put a glass tube in his mouth, and now a third was wheeling in a curious little bed on wheels.

He turned restlessly from the black-browed, anxious face bending over him to the door where Mrs. Queerington was entering. But he knew by experience that it would be some time before she reached him. All those other sick duffers would want her to talk to them, and the nurses would stop her, and the young house-doctor would claim a flower for his buttonhole. Chick hated them all indiscriminately. It seemed an hour before her bright, reassuring face bent over him, and he heard her say:

"It won't be long, now, Chicky Boy. Dr. Wyeth will be here soon, and they will give you a ride on this funny little wagon. I wonder what Skeeter Sheeley is doing about this time? Going to school, I expect."

This diverted Chick marvelously. The thought of Skeeter having to spend the morning in the schoolroom, made his own lot less hard.

"Is Number Seventeen prepared for the operation?" he heard some one ask, and at the same moment Aunt 'Tella's fingers closed on his like a vise.

Then the big doctor, who had brought him there, appeared at the foot of his bed.

"Ah, Mrs. Queerington!" he was saying, "the very sight of you ought to hearten up these youngsters. But you are still paler than I like to see you. Been overdoing again?"

She shook her head. "I'm all right, but what about your patient?"

The doctor stroked his chin and appeared to be interested in the ceiling. "Some rather grave complications. Very anemic. Very little to work on. Possibly an even chance. However —" he shrugged his broad shoulders. "Has he any people?"

"No, except this foster-aunt who supports him. Myrtella!"

But Myrtella had turned her back at sight of the doctor, and refused to look up.

Chick narrowly watching the two speakers at the foot of the bed, and trying vainly to understand what they were saying about him, was relieved when Dr. Wyeth handed Miss Lady a book and said lightly:

"You see that I, like everybody else, have fallen a victim to 'Khalil Samad.' I understand it is already in its tenth edition. Young Morley has a

career before him, if he gets through this trial. Do you know when it is set for?"

"November the sixth."

"So soon as that? Well, I don't know the young man, but I hope he'll be cleared. I want him to write some more books for me to read. I'm sorry Kinner has charge of the prosecution. He'd rather convict an innocent man than a guilty one. All right, my boy, I guess we are ready."

"Don't try to get up!" admonished the nurse to Chick; "I'll lift you over."

But Chick scorned assistance. Hadn't he only last week valiantly bucked the center in a football game between the Bean Alley Busters, and the Shanty Boat Bums, and, covered with mud and blood and glory, been carried from the field? They needn't think because he was little and thin and couldn't talk that he was a baby! He got himself on to the wheeled stretcher, but refused to lie down.

"Let him sit up then," said Mrs. Queerington. "He likes to see where he is going, don't you, Chick? Here goes our automobile! Honk! Honk!"

The nurse wheeled him through the tall, gloomy halls, while Myrtella shambled at one side, clinging to his hand, and wiping her eyes. Miss Lady flitted along on the other, telling him about the new football that was going to be on his bed when he woke up.

Then they halted, and Myrtella bent over him wildly. "Chick!" she cried, her face suddenly contorted, "look at me just onct more! Tell me you fergive me, Chicky! Oh, if they kill you —!"

The stretcher was shoved hastily into the elevator and the door closed on everybody but Chick and the nurse and the orderly.

It was about that time that Chick decided to lie down. Where were they taking him? What were they going to do with him? What did Aunt 'Tella mean by those strange words? Where had Mis' Squeerington gone? With sudden quaking terror he looked at the nurse and broke into hoarse interrogatory sounds.

"Here we are!" she cried soothingly, as the elevator came to a halt. "And here 's Dr. Wyeth waiting for us."

"Well, my little man," said the large figure in white, taking a small cold hand in his large strong one, "we are going to put you to sleep and when you wake up, it will be all over. You are pretty game, are n't you?"

Chick, trying very hard to keep his knees from shaking the sheet, nodded emphatically.

"I thought so," lied the doctor cheerfully, looking into the terror-stricken eyes. "I can almost always tell when a fellow 's made out of the right sort of stuff. You don't wear false teeth, do you?"

Chick's sudden, toothless smile revealed the futility of this question.

"That 's good. No danger of your swallowing them. Now suppose you put this funnel over your mouth and take a big breath. That 's right! Another one! That 's right, once more!"

Chick felt a hot, sweet air rush into his throat, and began to choke. But the doctor's voice kept saying insistently, "Once more!" "Once more, my boy!" And the doctor thought he was game. He shut his eyes and tried not to be afraid, but fearful things were happening! His skin was leaving his body; and he was going up in the air; lights danced before his eyes and he was suddenly in a terrible hurry about something. He had never been in such a hurry before! He was leaving doctors and nurses far below, he could hear their voices growing fainter every moment. Then suddenly the lights began to dance again, and the hurry came back, and all the breath was being squeezed out of him. No, he could n't be game any longer! He must fight! Savagely, blindly, dumbly he struggled against this awful unknown thing that was mastering him. Then, after a last agonizing effort he sank helplessly into the abyss of sleep.

Meanwhile, on the floor below, sitting on the cold bare steps beside the door of the elevator, two white-faced women waited anxiously. All was silent in

the high, narrow corridor except for the footsteps of passing nurses, and the occasional sharp cry of pain, or groan of weariness from some suffering patient.

"That 's him!" cried Myrtella hysterically as one of these cries reached her.

"No, no. He is sound asleep by this time. He won't know anything until it is all over." Then as another cry brought Myrtella to her feet, Miss Lady added, "Please, Myrtella, don't be so frightened. Those cries come from the floor below."

Myrtella shook off her hand impatiently. "How long have they been gone? Why did n't you tell me they was going to keep him hours and hours?"

"It 's only been twenty minutes. I know how anxious you are, but you must try to be calm. If you are n't they won't let you go in the room when they bring him down."

"Won't let me in the room!" Myrtella's face blazed with anger. "I 'd like to see 'em stop me! Who 's got a better right? The doctor? The nurse? You? There ain't none of you got the right to him I have. Ain't I his mother?"

Miss Lady looked at her with amazement, and shrank instinctively from the desperate, defiant woman.

"That 's right!" cried Myrtella, almost beside herself. "Snatch your hand off my arm, shrink away from me like I was a leper! Tell everybody,

tell the police that I throwed my baby in the ash barrel and abandoned it! It don't make no difference now, nothin' makes no difference but Chick. Oh, my God! How long have they been?"

"They will be down very soon now, Myrtella. Don't tear your handkerchief like that. Here, take mine."

But Myrtella's eyes were too full of terror for tears; she sat with her hands locked about her knees swaying to and fro.

"I 've never told nobody," she went on wildly; "all these years I 've kept it bottled up in my soul 'til it 's eat it plumb out. I never done it to Chick! He was n't Chick then. He was just somethin' that belonged to a devil. Then he growed to be Chick, and all my hate turned to love, and now God 's gittin' even, I knowed He would! He would n't let him live now, just to spite me!"

"Myrtella!" Miss Lady's voice commanded indignantly. "Don't you dare say such things! Who knows but this very minute God 's giving Chick back to you? Perhaps He is taking this way of showing you He forgives you. Pray to Him, Myrtella! Ask Him to do what 's best for Chick, whatever it may be."

Myrtella's head had sunken on her knees, and her coarse, work-hardened hands were clinging to Miss Lady's slender ones.

Suddenly they both started. The elevator descended creakingly and halted beside them. There was a shuffling of feet and the stretcher was wheeled past with a small, white-sheeted form lying motionless upon it.

"It 's all over," said Dr. Wyeth, following briskly. "He put up a pretty stiff fight while taking the anesthetic, but we downed him at last. The conditions were less serious than I anticipated. With care and good nursing he ought to get well right away now. Hello! Here 's another patient!"

. For Myrtella, glaring at him through her steel-rimmed spectacles, had dropped like a log straight across the corridor and lay unconscious with her fly-away hat crushed under one ear.

"Loosen her collar," directed Dr. Wyeth, "and bring me some ice water. There! She 'll come around in a minute."

He knelt beside her with his hand on her pulse, looking at her curiously. Then he turned to Miss Lady:

"Queer how faces come back to you. I attended this woman twelve years ago, when I was interne in the maternity ward at the City Hospital."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AS the sixth of November approached, Donald Morley's friends for the first time became seriously apprehensive over the result of his final trial. The fact that he had engaged an unknown, inexperienced lawyer to cope with the redoubtable Kinner, was looked upon as his crowning folly. The case, which had always excited considerable local interest on account of the prominence of the families involved, now became a matter of much graver significance, concerning, as it did, the author of " Khalil Samad," the most talked-about book of the hour.

Miss Lady, alone at Thornwood now, except for Bertie and Myrtella, fought through the days as best she could. Since Connie's confession she had seen little of her, for after a round of visits in the Blue Grass region, that restless young person had been with friends in town, and was still there when the date set for the trial arrived.

Up to this time Miss Lady had conquered in the hourly struggle she was making with her own heart. Again and again Donald had tried to see her, but

on one pretext or another she had evaded him. She was puzzled, bewildered, and hopelessly wretched, and she asked herself repeatedly why her happiness should be sacrificed for that of a shallow, irresponsible butterfly. For Donald, she had no blame, he had drifted into this affair with Connie when his need was greatest, and now that his honor was involved as well as hers, there must be no turning back.

But when the second day of the trial dawned, and she came down after a sleepless night to read discouraging news reports of the previous day's proceedings, she found that something stronger than herself was taking possession of her. In vain did she try to fulfil her accustomed tasks. Every atom of her was there in the courthouse beside Donald Morley, standing trial with him. Twice she flung on her coat and hat, only to take them off again, and stand at the window impatiently watching the storm.

For the long summer had finally come to an end. After days of radiant October sunshine, when winter seemed, like the hereafter, vague and far off, a wind came rushing out of the north, stripping the trees in a single night, and leaving them surprised at their sudden nakedness. Then the sleet came, and, not content with attacking trees and shrubs, must storm the house itself, invading windows and doors, besieging every nook and corner, only to

waste away at last into icy streams that went rattling noisily down the gutters.

As the morning wore on Miss Lady grew more and more restless. Suppose the preposterous should happen, and for the second time twelve honest men should pronounce an innocent man guilty? Could Connie face the ignominy of the verdict? Would her fickle, inconstant heart steady to such a test? Suppose that once again the person on whom Donald Morley depended, should fail him in a supreme hour?

For the third time Miss Lady threw on her wraps. She could no longer stand the suspense, she must go to him, in case he needed her.

"'Fore de Lawd!" exclaimed Uncle Jimpson when her intention was made known to him. "I dunno what ole John 'll think of us, takin' him to de station a day lak dis! 'Sides de noon train 's done went."

"Then we 'll have to drive to town. Hitch up as quickly as you can!"

"But, Miss Lady, Honey, you fergit de sleet! Ole John 'ud slide 'round de road lak a fly on a bald spot."

"No matter! I 'm going. Hurry!"

Myrtella, who was fashioning a dough man, under the personal supervision of Bert, looked up indignantly:

"You don't think you are going out in this storm without no lunch, do you?"

"I can't eat anything, I'm not hungry."

"That's what you said at breakfast. I ain't got a bit of patience with people that get theirselves sick in bed and be a nuisance to everybody, just for the pleasure of slopping around in the slush on a day like this. I'm going to fix you some toast and a egg, while he's hitchin' up."

"Go on with the story, 'Tella," demanded Bertie, carefully bestowing a nose on the dough man.

"Well," resumed Myrtella, from the stove, casting an anxious glance at Miss Lady who stood at the window impatiently tapping the pane, "everbody was a wonderin' what would be his very first words, an' Dr. Wyeth he sez, 'Don't pester him to talk, jes' let it come natural.' One day me an' the nurse, the stuck-up one I was tellin' you 'bout, was fixin' to spray out his throat, an' he look so curious at all the little rubber tubes, an' fixin's, that she sez, 'You'll know a lot when you leave here, Chick.' And what do you think he up an' answered? Just as smart an' plain as if he'd a been talkin' all his life?"

"What?" demanded Bertie as breathlessly as if he had n't heard the story a dozen times.

"'Shucks,' sez Chick, 'I knowed a lot when I come!'"

Myrtella's pride in this first articulation of her offspring was so great that it rendered her oblivious to the fact that the toast was scorching.

"When will you be able to bring Chick home?" asked Miss Lady, gulping down the hot tea with a watchful eye on the stable door.

"Jes' as soon as the doctor quits foolin' with his throat every day. He 's been gittin' on fine ever' since I took him back to Phineas'. Maria 's gittin' right stuck on him, now she 's got to give him up. Says she always knowed he was smart, but she never dreamed of the things he had bottled up in his head."

"I have n't forgotten about your house," said Miss Lady absently. "Dr. Wyeth knows a nice place down on Chestnut Street, and says you can make a good living letting the rooms to shopgirls. It is n't right for me to keep you out here any longer."

"Well, I ain't goin' 'til spring." Myrtella rattled the pans with unnecessary vehemence. "Me an' Chick 's goin' to stay right here 'til we git you settled. Now that Mr. Gooch has got a spell of spendin', an' is sendin' Miss Hattie to college, I guess she 's settled fer a spell. Like as not Miss Connie 'll be marryin' some smart-alecky, good-fer-nothin' fellow, then she 'll be settled. But what 's goin' to become of you and Bertie?"

Miss Lady leaned impulsively over the child's

back as he knelt in a chair beside the table, and kissed the bit of neck that showed between the collar and the curls: "Bert and I?" she repeated with a little catch in her voice; "why, we'll have to take care of each other, won't we, Bert?"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE Flathers' family was indulging in a birthday party. The table, set in the bedroom so that Chick might participate, was decorated at one end by a gorgeous pink cake, bearing a single candle, and at the other by Loreny herself, blue of eye, and chubby of cheek, who crawled triumphantly about among the dishes, bestowing equal attention on the sugar bowl and the molasses jug, only pausing to emit ecstatic screams when a rough, red head appeared above the table rim.

In the bed, propped on pillows and with throat bandaged, Chick executed a lively tune with knife and fork on his plate, while Maria Flathers dedicated herself to the task of preventing Loreny May from putting her blue-slippered foot in the butter.

Without, the sleet pelted the windows, and the red top of Mr. Iseling's wagon waiting at the gate. It whistled and rattled down Bean Alley and converted the telegraph wires into cables of ice. But the Flathers family, luxuriating in the unusual extravagance of an open fire, and cheered by the hilarity of the occasion, was happily oblivious to the

storm until a sharp rap at the door brought the red-headed bear from under the table to answer the summons.

"Well, if it ain't Mis' Squeerington!" cried Phineas Flathers effusively. "Out in all this storm! But I ain't surprised. Did n't I tell you, Maria, that I knowed she 'd bring the baby a birthday present? Come up to the fire, mam. Maria git her a rocker."

"No, no!" cried Miss Lady breathlessly. "I can't stay. I must get to town. My horse broke down in the bridge, and I 'm on my way to the Junction to see if I can't get on the next train when it stops for water. I want you to go over and help me on."

"Next train don't stop. It 's a express. The local ain't due fer a hour an' a half. You ain't fit to go on yit, mam, nohow. I never seen you all in like this before! Maria, can't you fix her up a cup of coffee or somethin'?"

Miss Lady shook her head, and leaned wearily against the mantel.

"I 'll be all right. Are you sure about the trains?"

"Sure az the taxes. You 're in fer a wait, an' we 'll git a nice little visit out of you. Guess you are 'sprised to see me home this time of day?"

"I had n't thought about it."

"Well, you see it 's her birthday, an' tor*n*adoes could n't 'a' kept me from bringin' her a cake. Ain't she the purties' object you ever set yer two optics on? Say 'Da-da,' Loreny,— leave off talkin' to her, Chick. Go on, Loreny, say, 'Da-da' fer de purty lady!"

"He 's that silly about her," said Maria Flathers, trying to conceal her own pride. "He won't leave me put anything but white dresses and blue shoes on her, an' he works extra time to pay fer 'em. Myrtella says there ain't no fools like old ones."

"That 's all right," said Phineas; "she 'll have more to say when I give Loreny a diamond ring on her next birthday. Iseling 'll be givin' me a raise soon. He 's as good as said so. He knows I 'm good fer everything from bossin' a big job to drivin' a wagon; then look at the trade I command! Why, Mis' Squeerington, them Ladies' Aiders in the Immanuel Church, follered me solid, an' Mrs. Ivy an' the Anti-Tobacs — Shoo, I could start out fer myself to-morrow."

"It 's one o'clock!" warned Maria, anxious to speed her master on his way in order that she might come in for a few conversational crumbs.

"One o'clock! Holy Moses! I must be hiking, if I want to hear the rest of the trial."

"The trial?" repeated Miss Lady instantly alert; "were you at the courthouse this morning?"

"Yes, mam, I was. Everybody was. Court room packed to the doors. I sez to Iseling this morning, I sez, 'I 'll make the noon delivery all right, but the rest of the day 's my own. It ain't only because of my former connection with the Sequin family,' sez I; 'it 's because Mr. Don Morley is a personal friend of mine. He 's white an' he 's square,' sez I, 'an' the open-handedest young gent I ever done a favor for. If it 's a case of standin' by him in trouble, or losin' my job,' I sez, 'why ta-ta to the job!'"

"But when you left," urged Miss Lady, "what were they doing? How did people feel about it?"

"Mighty shaky, mam. They ain't got a scrap of good evidence fer him, an' enough ag'in him to sink a ship. Old man Wicker's son is puttin' up a stiff fight, but he 's up aginst Kinner, an' Kinner could convict St. Peter hisself!"

"But can't they get the truth out of Sheeley? Can't they force him to tell what happened?"

Phineas shrugged contemptuously: "Sheeley lost his memory when he lost his eye. One was put out with lead, an' the other with silver. Says now he was n't in the fight at all."

"It 's a lie! He wuz!" Chick had risen from his pillow, and was leaning forward excitedly.

"What do you mean, Chick? How do you know?"

"He *wuz* in the fight!" he cried huskily. "It was 'tween him an' the drunk. Sheeley ketched him fakin' a ace, an' he calls Sheeley a liar, an' they fit all over the floor. The big one was n't in it! He kep' tryin' to stop 'em, buttin' in with his whip."

"But how do you know all this, Chick?" cried Miss Lady almost fiercely; "did the Sheeley boy tell you?"

"Skeeter? Shucks, he don't know nothin' 'ceptin' what his paw tole him."

"But who told you?"

Chick closed his lips and shook his head: "He 'll set the cop on me."

"Who?"

"Skeeter's paw. Fer smashin' the slot machine. But I never took none of his money, Mis' Squeerington; it was mine!" His lips began to tremble.

"The cop won't get you, Chick," said Miss Lady, now on her knees beside him, coaxing out each statement, and trying to keep down her excitement. "Tell me, quick! How do you know about the shooting?"

"'Cause," said Chick fearfully, "I — I seen it!"

"Well, if that ain't the limit!" said Phineas, while Maria gathered Loreny up under the impression that Chick had lost his mind, and might become dangerous.

"I got shut up in the saloon," continued Chick, evidently torn between the desire to be a hero and the fear of the consequences, "an' it was night, an' I went to sleep."

"Yes, yes!" pressed Miss Lady; "go on."

"Then they come in an' got to rough-housin' an' I crawl up-stairs an' lay on me stommick an' peek through the crack. An' Sheeley an' the Drunk they got to scrappin' like I tole you. An' then while the big one was tryin' to git Sheeley to quit, the Drunk he come over to the door right where I was layin' at, an' he steady hisself aginst the wall an' bang loose at Sheeley with a pistol."

"Would you know the Big One again? Oh, Chick, try to remember what he looked like!"

Chick shook his head, "Naw, I don't 'member what none of 'em looked like. But you know which one he was; he gimme the silver knob offen his whip."

Miss Lady sprang to her feet: "We must get him to the courthouse, Mr. Flathers. Quick! Help me with his clothes. I 'll put on his shoes and stockings."

"But the train —" began Phineas.

"We can't wait for it!" cried Miss Lady. "You must drive us in the wagon." In a surprisingly few minutes Chick, bewildered but interested, was fully clothed. "Give me the blankets off the bed and

"Tell me quick! How do you know about the shooting?"

help me wrap them around him," said Miss Lady. "There! You carry him and I'll hold the umbrella. Keep your mouth shut, Chick; don't you dare open it until I tell you."

The bewildered Chick, encased like a mummy, was rushed out to the wagon and deposited between two ice-cream freezers, while Miss Lady knelt beside him, trying to shield him from the wind. Just as Phineas was driving away there was a call from the cottage.

For the first and only time in her life Maria Flathers had collided with an idea. In vain she reversed her mental engines and tried to back off, but the collision was head on, and she and the idea were firmly welded together.

"Here's the whip han'le!" she called wildly, as the wind caught her skirts and twisted them about her. "I been usin' it fer a thimble. An' here's the whip itself — Take 'em along! Take 'em fer a witness!"

Once again the red-topped wagon got started, this time in earnest. Through the mud and slush of Bean Alley, past the Dump Heap, across the Common, the sturdy little mare dashed furiously.

"Don't breathe through your mouth, Chick!" implored Miss Lady. "And don't be afraid. All you have to do is to tell what you saw. Don't keep back anything, tell it just as you told it to me."

"'Bout the slot machine?" queried an anxious voice from the blankets.

"About everything. Nobody is going to hurt you, or blame you. You are n't catching cold, are you? Here put on my gloves, and you must n't talk, not another word."

For an interminable time they splashed through the slush of the road, before they came to the pavements of the city. Looking out of the wagon, they could see the broad yellow waters of the river with its long, black coal barges, and the dim outline of Billy-goat Hill, growing fainter in the distance.

"Faster, Mr. Flathers, drive faster!" implored Miss Lady.

Phineas willingly laid the whip across the flank of the little mare, and they dashed along, through the crowded thoroughfare into a broad street of warehouses, where they followed the tramway straight across the murky city. All the while the sleet beat on the red top of the wagon and rattled under the horse's hoofs, and Miss Lady sat clasping Chick, counting the passing moments.

At last the dark courthouse loomed up ahead of them, and Phineas rounding a curb by a fraction, dashed for the open square.

"Morley case gone to the jury?" he hung half out of the wagon to shout to a man coming down the wide steps.

"Not yet."

Miss Lady was already frantically pulling the blankets from the submerged Chick.

"Wait for Mr. Flathers to carry you," she cried, springing to the ground and looking up at him anxiously. "Remember you are going to tell them everything. You are helping to save Mr. Morley, and you're doing it for me."

The eyes of the pale, spindle-legged child, standing in the end of the wagon, flashed past the courthouse to the barred windows of the adjoining jail. Suddenly his legs fell to shaking harder even than they had shaken at the hospital, and his lips quivered threateningly.

"Chick!" cried Miss Lady despairingly. "You aren't going to fail me — you are going to stand by me, aren't you?"

For a moment he shut his eyes very tight, then he transferred the small quid of tobacco which had been his one solace in the past hour, from his right cheek to his left.

"Sure!" he said resolutely.

CHAPTER XXX

ONE! two! three! four!"

The big clock that had ticked away so many anxious moments for so many anxious watchers, hurled its announcement over the crowded court room. The last testimony had been given, Chick had told his story, produced his proofs and identified Morley; the prosecuting attorney had torn his story to tatters, and confused the youthful witness hopelessly; the counsel for the defense had now risen to make his final speech to the jury. Suspense hung thick as a fog over the court room.

Miss Lady, sitting between Mr. Gooch and Connie, pushed back her short black veil impatiently. The hours she had fought through since midnight seemed as nothing compared to this eternity of waiting. Since entering the room she had not once looked at Donald. She dared not open even a tiny sluice in the dike that held back the sea of her love. But in every fiber of her being she felt him sitting there under suspicion, his future in the hands of twelve men who had the power of making him suffer the penalty of a crime which he had not committed.

It was unjust, cruel, infamous! Surge after surge of indignation swept over her. She would fight for him against them all. She would get up and tell what she knew of the story, and his reason for staying abroad.

"Is n't he magnificent?" whispered Connie, clasping her arm; "he has been perfectly calm and quiet like that all along, and yet think what it means to him! Look at his eyes!"

Miss Lady could not look, the grip at her throat was tightening and a dull roar sounded in her ears.

"But if he loses, Connie? If he loses, what then?"

"He won't lose. He 's going to win. You ought to have heard him this morning. He was perfectly magnificent! Even Mr. Gooch said he made him think of Lincoln. Listen to him now!"

Miss Lady followed Connie's adoring gaze until it rested on the stern, earnest face of Noah Wicker, then the truth rushed upon her.

For a moment a blindness seized her, then she sprang to her feet and lifted her face to Don. He had been waiting for that look ever since she entered the court room, and when it came he was ready for it.

As Noah Wicker sat down amid a thunder of applause, and the jury, after a brief charge from the bench made ready to retire, a slender, black-gowned

figure pushed her way impetuously through the crowd. She circled the rear seats and rushed headlong to where the defendant sat.

"Are you a member of Mr. Morley's family?" asked the deputy sheriff.

"No," said Miss Lady, brushing him aside, "but I'm going to be."

CHAPTER XXXI

THAT evening Mr. Gooch went home with the Ivys whom, as he was now adrift, he purposed adopting. For a long time they sat over the fire discussing the exciting events of the day.

"I could scarcely believe my eyes," murmured Mrs. Ivy, "when at the verdict, 'Not Guilty,' I saw her fling her arms about his neck!"

"Why surprised?" snapped the attorney. "Are n't women born fatuous?"

"But the whole thing is so indelicate, so heartless! A young widow who ought to be mourning beside her husband's grave, and a wild young man who has just escaped the penitentiary. Has n't suffering taught them anything?"

Gerald, sitting on a hassock before the fire with hands clasped about his knees, looked up with shining eyes:

"You don't understand, Mater! All this has been the price they 've paid for each other. A great love like theirs comes high. One must pay for it with suffering. Jove, it was worth it! That one look they gave each other, there at the end —"

"But the dear, dear Doctor," interrupted Mrs. Ivy, "laid away only seven months ago!"

"Six months and three weeks," corrected Mr. Gooch testily.

THE END

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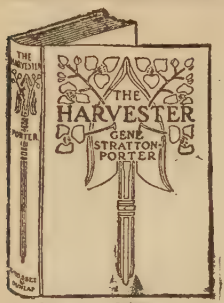

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